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Choice



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BIGSCREEN BRILLIANCE

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Mindblowing
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On Test

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19-channel processor
Triangle Borea speakers
LG smart projector
Philips 'The One' TV
Sonus faber Omnia
Hisense soundbar



Revealed!

**Hollywood's
biggest box
office flops**

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→ OPINION → MERIDIAN AUDIO MOVIE ROOM → THE MAKING OF JURASSIC PARK

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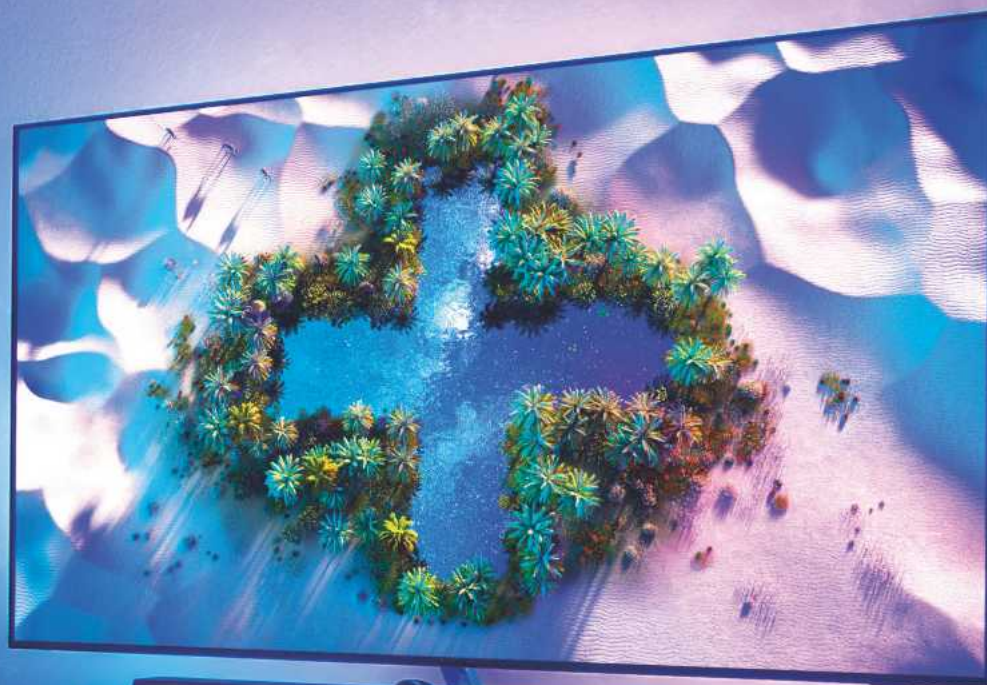
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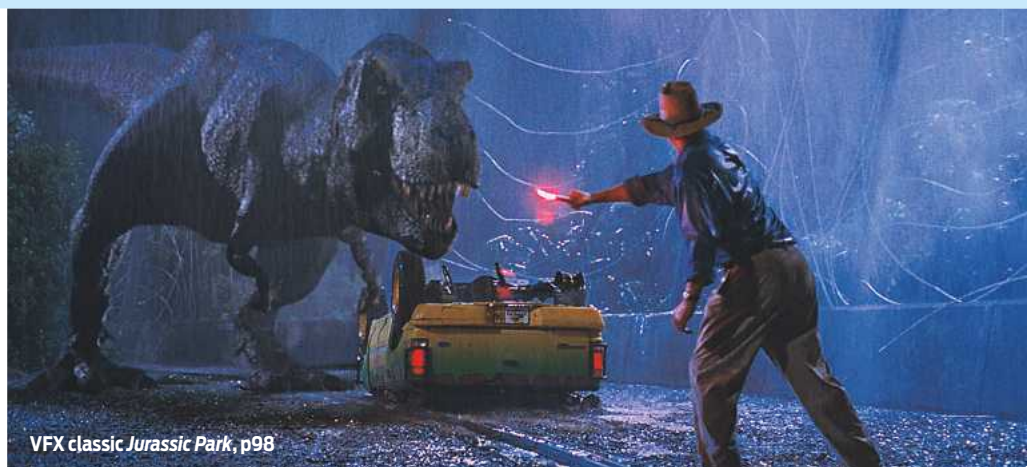
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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE: July 21, 2022



VFX classic Jurassic Park, p98

Welcome

It wasn't long ago that a 42in TV was considered big.

But, even though the size of our living rooms hasn't changed much, image quality and display technology

have, to the point where Samsung's monster-sized

75in QN900B TV (p48) isn't actually the largest model in the

range. Can't accommodate the 85-incher? Then this stunning

8K HDR flatscreen is for you.



Unless, of course, you want to go really large. **Home cinema projection has moved on a lot** from the days of bulky

CRT models that threatened to bring down your ceiling. Today's beamers are far easier to live with, not to mention light years ahead in terms of performance. This issue we check out a pair of

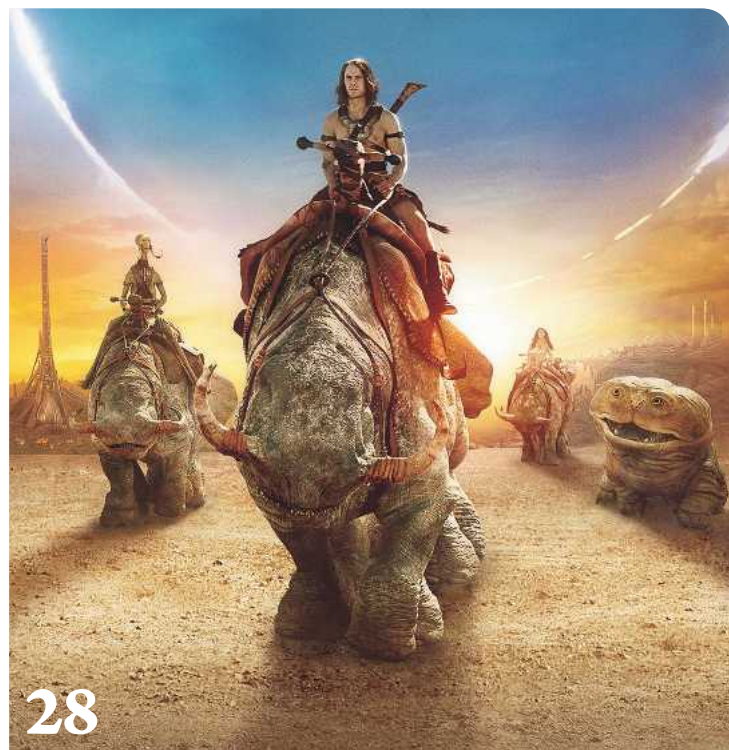
models with different approaches to bigscreen viewing – LG's ultra-short-throw HU715Q (p60), and BenQ's gamer-friendly X3000i. Both will take your home entertainment to 100in and

beyond. Now that *is* big.

Mark Craven
Editor



MENU



CONTRIBUTORS



John Archer:
The experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



Jon Thompson:
Film producer and post-production expert delves into Hollywood and AV



Steve May:
HCC's former Ed. is one of the UK's most respected AV journo



Anton van Beek:
Our avid movie watcher and disc collector cut his teeth on *Total DVD*



Richard Stevenson:
Former Editor of the UK CE trade journal *ERT*



Ed Selley:
Audiophile Ed mixes his home cinema passion with a love of vinyl



Steve Withers:
Movie fan, display calibrator and object-based audio obsessive

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Klipsch[®]

REFERENCE



NEXT GENERATION

REFERENCE

Series WITH **DOLBY ATMOS**



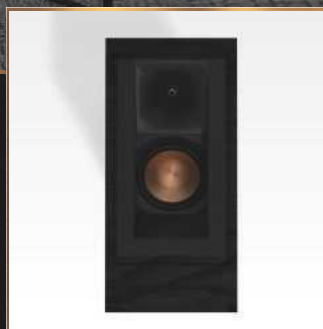
All new 90° x 90° Tractrix Horn

Klipsch's exclusive Tractrix horn technology mated to a 1" aluminium LTS Tweeter delivers the power, detail and emotion of the live music experience with the cleanest most natural sound possible.



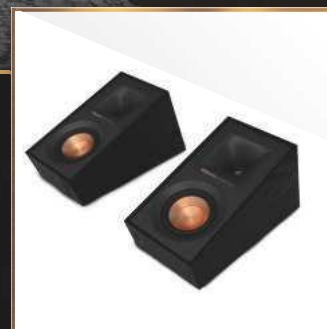
Spun Copper IMG Woofers

Injection moulded graphite (IMG) woofer cones are exceptionally light while being extremely rigid. This combination provides remarkable low frequency response. With minimal cone break-up and distortion.



Home Cinema System

Klipsch's reference base home cinema speaker range offers a complete hemisphere of rich, detailed sound and at the greatest value possible. Your music and movies will never sound the same again.



Atmos Cinema Toppers

The cinema speaker range offers both inset and external atmos speaker toppers. Like their bigger counterparts both incorporate the 90 x 90 degree tractrix horn and spun copper IMG woofers immersing you in a bubble of sound.



Distributed by Henley Audio

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BULLETIN

→ **NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** **MONITOR AUDIO** Cinergy loudspeaker series targets home cinema builds **KEF** Floorstanding wireless speaker duo with UniCore tech **TCL** It's Google all the way for brand's Mini LED TVs **AT THE PLEX** This month's cinema releases **NEWS X10** News stories in bite-sized chunks **DOG SOLDIERS** Neil Marshall's cult horror finally hits BD and 4K **& MORE!**

Doubling down on 4K laser

Sony VPL-XW7000ES/VPL-XW5000ES → pro.sony



Sony's home cinema projector range is now an all-laser affair following the arrival of two new 'XW' models that replace the lamp-based VW790ES and VW590ES. Priced £14,999 and £5,999 respectively, the XW7000ES (3,200 Lumens) and XW5000ES (2,000 Lumens) both feature native 4K SXRD optics, Dynamic HDR Enhancer technology, and 70mm 'advanced crisp focus' lenses. Sony's cabinets have been reduced in size and restyled, and are offered in black or white for both models.

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Wireless wonders?

KEF LS60 Wireless → uk.kef.com

PDF NEWSPAPERS and
MAGAZINES:
WWW.XSAVA.XYZ

For the new LS60 Wireless, KEF has adapted the overlapping voice coil tech (UniCore) of its KC62 subwoofer (HCC #320) to side-mount four 5.25in bass drivers in a floorstanding cabinet measuring just 15cm wide (excluding plinth). These are positioned in push-pull pairs above and below the front-facing Uni-Q mid/tweeter array to create a 'single point source' speaker, with all drivers fed by a mix of Class D and Class AB amps rated at 1,400W. Playback through this premium £6,000 system is via Wi-Fi/Ethernet, Bluetooth, or analogue/digital ins. Control is via remote handset or app, the latter allowing 'expert' sound tuning.



Compact XGIMI projection



Chinese projector corp XGIMI has secured distribution of its diminutive

Elfin model through Argos. Priced £599 and designed for plug-n-play entertainment, the Full HD beamer features an in-built Harman Kardon speaker array, Android 10 smart system and slim, 20cm wide chassis. Imaging is courtesy of DLP technology, an 800 Lumens-rated LED light source, and 1.2:1 throw lens. HDR10 playback is offered, with 4K sources downsampled. Inputs include Bluetooth, HDMI, USB and Wi-Fi. uk.xgimi.com

Cord cut for entry-level M Series



Audio-Technica's ATH-M20xBT is a new addition to its M Series 'monitor' headphone range, adding a wireless (Bluetooth) connection to the wired input of the earlier M20x design. Available now priced

£79, these 40mm driver cans claim 60 hours playtime from their rechargeable battery, and support 'multipoint pairing' of two Bluetooth devices simultaneously. There's no active noise cancelling, but Audio-Technica says the over-ear design is effective at blocking out external hubbub. www.audio-technica.com

Cinergy speakers for AV

New Monitor Audio range designed to suit any home cinema install

Monitor Audio has announced Cinergy, a new 'premium cinema audio system' designed for dedicated rooms.

The range, which is certified THX Ultra, comprises three loudspeaker models and a passive subwoofer, all intended for either on-wall, in-wall or in-room installation.

The UK loudspeaker maker says this 'highly adaptable' system has been engineered 'with the knowledge that no two installations are the same.' Therefore, the mid and tweeter driver arrays on the Cinergy 100, Cinergy 200 and Cinergy 300 speakers are all rotatable to allow for horizontal/vertical placement – and on the largest '300 model, this array can be interchanged with one of the two bass drivers, for fine-tuning the sound profile.

Additionally, the speakers feature integrated handles, plus feet and isolation brackets to counter vibrations depending on installation method.

For this new high-end range, Monitor Audio has deployed its MPD (Micro Pleated Diaphragm) tweeter design, previously found on its Platinum and



Put this 'sound wall' behind your projector screen, says MA

Gold Series. This is joined by dedicated mid and bass drivers on all three speakers.

The Cinergy Sub15, meanwhile, features a 15in 'ultra-high-excursion' C-CAM woofer within a sealed cabinet with an in-wall-friendly 28cm depth. For power, this passive model will be sold with Monitor Audio's IA800-2C installation amplifier, which can support a pair of the Sub15s via its 2 x 800W output.

Made to match

Monitor Audio intends its new lineup to not only be flexible regards installation, but to cover all the channel configuration bases. Its website outlines possible 7.2.2, 9.4.4 and 9.4.6 arrays, as well as

something it describes as a 'sound wall', which makes use of the fact the Sub15 is half the height of the Cinergy 300 to stack four of the woofers within an L/C/R layout.

The series will be available from July, with pricing TBC. www.monitoraudio.com

Rotatable mid/tweeter arrays support horizontal/vertical positioning



Playlist...

What Team HCC has been watching this month

Shaft (BD)



Criterion brings the original *Shaft* back to Blu-ray with a new 4K restoration and oodles of extras. Can you dig it?

The Boy Behind the Door (BD)



Cat-and-mouse thriller about two kidnapped kids thrives on the superb performances of its juvenile leads.

Chip 'n' Dale: Rescue Rangers (Disney+)



Goofy enough for kids and packed with adult-pleasing meta gags, this reboot of the 1980s 'toon is an absolute hoot.

The Green Mile (4K BD)



Frank Darabont's *other* Stephen King prison drama get a gorgeous 4K/Atmos upgrade.

Moonfall (4K BD)



Sci-fi disaster flick delivers all the popcorn thrills you could ask for on this US import UHD platter.

At the 'plex...

Heading out to see a flick?
Catch these this month

Lightyear

June 17: Ever wondered what inspired the Buzz Lightyear action figure? Well, the *Toy Story* fave gets his very own origin movie this summer, with Chris Evans providing the voice of the Space Ranger, marooned on a hostile planet light years from Earth.

Elvis

June 24: Musical biopic starring Austin Butler as King of rock 'n' roll Elvis Presley and Tom Hanks as his manager, Colonel Tom Parker. 'This ain't no nostalgia show. We're gonna do something different,' says director Baz Luhrmann.

Thor: Love and Thunder

July 8: Another solo outing, directed by Taika Waititi, for Marvel's Asgardian God. Well, we say 'solo', but this new caper finds Chris Hemsworth's Thor joined by Natalie Portman as... The Mighty Thor! Say what?

TCL C Series goes Google

Company's UK Mini LED and LED models now mirror European spec

Since arriving in earnest in the UK in 2017, Chinese TV company TCL has offered region-specific models that have often missed out on features enjoyed in European markets. For 2022, however, the company has confirmed its upper-tier C Series, which features both Mini LED and traditional LED sets, will be identical on both sides of the channel.

This means UK telly shoppers will get the Google TV smart system, in place of the Android implementation of last year, and the same processing and HDMI specifications. At the same time, Freeview Play integration has been removed, although the brand is confident buyers won't miss it.

The new sets are due at retailers in the second half of the year. Prices are TBC, but we expect TCL to once again undercut more established rivals.

Give us a boost

Leading the charge for TCL's Mini LED models – now into third-gen guise – will be the C93, available at 75in and 65in. Improvements over the 2021 iteration include a boost to peak brightness to a claimed 2,000 nits, and an increase in the number of dimming zones to 'the thousands'. The TV will also integrate a Dolby Atmos sound system with a pair of upfiring speakers.

TCL's 'high-contrast' VA-type LCD panel is



The incoming C93 Mini LED ups peak brightness and local dimming potential

mounted to a Quantum Dot layer to enable full coverage of the DCI-P3 colour space, and features an anti-reflection coating to improve subjective black level performance.

Below the C93 is another Mini LED model, the C83 (75in, 65in, 50in) and the LED-based C73 (98in, 75in, 65in, 55in, 50in, 43in). All feature Dolby Vision and HDR10+ playback, plus HDMI 2.1 connection with support for Auto Low Latency Mode and VRR (to 144Hz on the '83 and '93 sets, and 55in and 65in C73 models).

Rounding out TCL's AV lineup will be a flagship Dolby Atmos soundbar, the C935U.

This uses TCL's 'Ray-Danz' driver dispersion technology to create a wide soundstage 'without any digital processing', and claims a 5.1.2 channel count.

www.tcl.com/uk



The 5.1.2-channel C935U 'bar will ship with a subwoofer

'Let there be light', says Optoma

High-brightness UHD55 projector aims at gamers and HDR movie fans

Optoma has added to its 4K DLP projector lineup with the UHD55, a 'home entertainment' model claiming a 3,600 Lumens brightness output.

A £1,400 price tag ranges it above many 'budget' 4K beamers, as does its setup potential. Optical zoom is 1.3x, leading to a throw ratio of 1.21-1.59:1, and there's vertical lens shift (as well as vertical and horizontal keystone) to better align images with your screen.

Playback of HDR10 and HLG sources, via the projector's twin HDMI inputs, is complemented by wide colour handling. Optoma's Pure Motion processing also features, plus colour management

and ISF calibration presets, and Full HD 3D compatibility.

The UHD55's light source is a traditional lamp with a suggested 'lifetime' of up to 15,000 hours when used in Dynamic mode (keep the projector in Bright mode, for 'lights on' viewing, and the lamp should be good for 4,000 hours, says Optoma).

An Enhanced Gaming Mode claims a 16ms response time with 4K/60Hz sources, and 4ms at 1080p/240Hz.

www.optoma.co.uk

Aiding setup are vertical lens shift and 1.3x optical zoom controls





WORLD'S FIRST THX CERTIFIED DOMINUS SPEAKERS



"It's rare to find an audio product, let alone a loudspeaker, that is beyond reproach. The S7t is one such loudspeaker."

Stereophile, December 2021



"...undoubtedly a technically clever loudspeaker, but engineered for one simple goal – making great-sounding music... you should definitely think about buying them."

Hi Fi News, April 2022



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Discs spinning your way in the coming month...

June 20

X [2022]
The Card Counter
Columbia Noir #5: ...Bogart
Dirty Dancing 4K Steelbook
The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie: 50th Anniversary 4K
Dr. Who and the Daleks 4K
Elizabeth Taylor in London/Sophia Loren in Rome
Giant 4K
Jailhouse Rock
The Mechanic [1972]
The Shaolin Plot
Singin' in the Rain 4K
Viva Las Vegas
Wellington Paranormal: S4
The Witch: Limited Edition 4K

June 27



Ambulance 4K
Amityville: Blu-ray Collection
The Appointment [1981]
Belle 4K [2021]
Blue Bayou
Morbis 4K
The Seventh Curse: Deluxe Col. Ed.
Spanish Fly
The Umbrella Academy: S2
Whoops Apocalypse

July 4

Alice in Borderland
Drive My Car
Summer Time Machine Blues

July 11

The Beatles: Get Back Col.'s Ed.
Future Boy Conan: Part 2 4K
Hitcher in the Dark: Deluxe Col. Ed.
Knife of Ice: Deluxe Col. Ed.
Mary, Queen of Scots
The Rising
Star Trek: Lower Decks – S2

July 18

Bullfighter and the Lady
Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150A.D. 4K
Fear Index
The Matrix: 4-Film Deja Vu Collection 4K [Zavvi-exclusive]
Okja
Red Sonya 4K
Tenebrae: 4K Limited Edition

INTERVIEW

The studio to your home

Chris Walls and **Julian Spiers** discuss their install company Indesign Theatre, which leverages their professional audio heritage to build high-end custom cinemas

Who are you?

Chris: I studied music and acoustics, followed by a masters in audio acoustics and was incredibly lucky to land a job designing recording studios straight after. In my first job, I designed studios for U2, the BBC and Dolby's Atmos screening room in London, which I believe was the first purpose-built Atmos room in Europe, possibly the world. I set up my own acoustic design company in 2014.

Justin: I wrote and produced dance music under various guises in the '90s but continued my career in technical positions within the music industry, including head of technical engineering for a big London studio, and various other consultancy roles, before setting up Studio Creations – a studio design, build and technical integrator – in 2005.

So why the new consumer-focused project?

Chris: We were working on a private studio for a music artist and they showed us their home cinema. It looked great but was acoustically and technically very poor. Then we found out how much they'd paid for it – it was more expensive than the studio!

This was around the time we were finishing off a screening room for Lucasfilm at Pinewood Studios, used for reviewing dailies, etc, for the last *Star Wars* film. It was far more technically advanced and sonically accurate yet cost less than this client's home cinema. We could see no reason why the same principles and standards couldn't be applied to a high-end home theatre.

How are you different from other installers?

Our affiliated companies have created studio facilities for many of the world's biggest filmmakers, broadcasters and musicians. We know how content should sound and look, and that comes from designing dubbing and grading theatres which turn out Oscar-winning sound and picture.

What typifies one of your projects?

Because each home cinema is a bespoke design, our services depend in part on the customer requirements. Sometimes our work is a small part of a much bigger scheme, in which case we slot into the wider design team, but more often we provide a turnkey design, build and install service. The design



Installer Indesign Theatre has a background in professional studios and screening rooms

process usually starts with an acoustic survey and thorough appraisal of the performance requirements for the build in terms of isolation, building services noise, room acoustics and technical integration.

This determines the size,

shape and construction methods and forms the basis of the ensuing design. From there we start looking at equipment, technical and interior design and furnishing options, which is where the client often gets heavily involved. We then turn that into a fully coordinated set of construction drawings and specifications for the site team to execute.

Any famous clients?

Many of our customers are high-profile and we take their privacy seriously. However, a few house-hold names that we've worked with that are happy for us to mention include Noel Gallagher, Idris Elba, Mark Ronson, Coldplay and Muse. On the corporate side, we've worked with Apple, Netflix, Disney, Warner Bros and Lucasfilm.

What kit do you use in your home theatres?

We'll select equipment that is most suitable based on the type of room and the client's requirements. But the kit we use is only a small part of the equation; without good acoustic technical design you can't realise the full potential of the equipment. There is no substitute for a properly designed room – an incorrect listening environment can and will fluctuate up to +/- 12dB at any given point within the room, which is a complete disaster in a commercial facility, so why would you do it in your own home?

What's been your most challenging install?

We designed a very high-end space for a client which was directly next door to the bedroom of the nanny's apartment. The client used the room for watching films as well as playing and recording with his band, which he tended to do until the small hours. The big challenge here was to isolate the noise from a full band (say 130dB) sufficiently that the nanny could sleep in the next room! Sound isolation is always a big consideration for our projects, but this was a pretty extreme situation.

indesigntheatre.co.uk

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 Hi-fi with knobs on

It might look like set dressing from *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, but actually pictured above is a new integrated stereo amplifier from Korean marque HiFi Rose. Eschewing the touchscreen simplicity of its RS201E media streamer (HCC #323), the RA180 instead presents a fascia full of dials, buttons and meters. Claiming a 2 x 400W output via a quartet of bridgeable amp modules and priced £5,499, it hopefully comes with a manual.

2 TV times

Sony has almost finished rolling out the wide range of Bravia XR TVs it announced earlier this year. Premium sets now available for pre-order include the Master Series A95 QD OLED and X95K Mini LED, plus a slate of 4K LCD sets beginning with the entry-level X72K range.

3 Don't call them censors...

The official podcast of the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) has returned after a winter hiatus. Its first episode of 2022 (#110) shines a light on the recent spate of 'dark' superhero movies, including *The Batman* and *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, and its classification process. Find the episode by searching for 'BBFC Podcast' on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, or heading to www.bbfc.co.uk.

4 Minions for your turntable

If you needed proof of the vinyl revolution, look no further than the official soundtrack for upcoming animation *Minions: The Rise of Gru*, which is receiving three separate releases on the 'retro' format, including limited edition picture disc. And if you still have a Walkman, you can get it on cassette too.

5 Wonderful Cinerama

Widescreen Weekend, the celebration of large format cinema at Bradford's National Science and Media Museum, is returning this October, and will be headlined by a remastered screening of 1962's *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* in Cinerama.

6 Keystone in the pipeline

Microsoft has revealed it is working on a streaming hardware device that will bring its Xbox Cloud Gaming platform to any TV without the need for an Xbox console. It's currently going by the codename 'Project Keystone', with no word on when it might materialise.

7 Meeting of two great Danes

The UK arm of loudspeaker brand DALI has inked a deal to become a distributor of audio products from fellow Danish brand Lyngdorf. 'We feel confident that our presence among specialized audio dealers in the UK will increase,' says Anker Haldan, Steinway Lyngdorf CCO.

8 LG cashes in

Demand for new OLED TVs in North America and Europe has helped LG's home entertainment wing record sales of \$3.3bn in Q1, 2022. Company-wide profits are up 6.6% over the same period last year.

9 Beeeeeeeeeep

1990 sci-fi horror *Flatliners*, a perennial cult fave, has been prepped for a 4K Blu-ray debut by Arrow Video.

Releasing on August 1, it will use a new master approved by cinematographer Jan de Bont, and house fresh extras including interviews and a critics' commentary track.

10 Star Wars SFX uncovered

Disney+ is launching a six-part documentary series on July 27 focusing on the special effects, production design and animation talent behind the *Star Wars* franchise. Titled *Light and Magic*, it will feature *Empire Strikes Back/Return of the Jedi* co-writer Lawrence Kasdan exploring the Lucasfilm archives.

Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films

The 'devil rides again



Marvel Studios has confirmed that work has begun on a new *Daredevil* series for Disney+. Charlie Cox, star of the Netflix incarnation of the character, is expected to reprise the title role, following his cameo in *Spider-Man: No Way Home*.

'Cadillacs zoom in America...'

Transporter 2's Louis Leterrier has replaced Justin Lin in the director's chair for the next instalment in the *Fast & Furious* franchise. The cast for *Fast X* continues to grow, too, with *West Side Story* legend Rita Moreno joining as Dominic Toretto's grandmother.

Robbie the robber

Margot Robbie has landed the lead role in a 1960s-set prequel to Steven Soderbergh's 2001 heist hit *Ocean's 11*. Soderbergh won't be directing this one, with the helmer of Robbie's 2019 film *Bombshell* taking the reins instead.



Sharper teeth than ever

Dog Soldiers → Second Sight → Ultra HD Blu-ray & Blu-ray

The days of having to put up with ropey overseas Blu-rays of Neil Marshall's rip-roaring action-horror debut *Dog Soldiers* will come to an end on July 26. Label Second Sight has assembled an army of fresh and legacy extras – including a new interview with Marshall – for a UK BD and 4K BD release of the 2002 cult fave, as well as tracking down previously missing camera negatives (earlier releases were sourced from prints instead) to complete the 4K restoration.



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Filmmaker Mode

Launched in 2019 with plenty of Hollywood fanfare, this 'artist first' picture preset is now a common sight on TV hardware. **John Archer** explains its pros and cons

There's always been tension between TV brands and the creators of our favourite TV series and films. Manufacturers want to show off the extreme image technologies their engineers have come up with, while filmmakers just want people to see their creations looking as they did when they were mastered on pro-grade studio monitors.

Filmmakers' ire has been particularly strong when it comes to TV motion processing (as famously lambasted by Tom Cruise and his screenwriting pal Chris McQuarrie, in a Twitter video in 2018). But in recent times that ire has spread to other picture areas too – colour, sharpness, etc.

The situation came to a head of sorts in 2019, when industry body the Ultra HD Alliance (members include Paramount, Universal and Warner Bros., plus various electronics corps) announced it was launching an initiative to create a dedicated picture preset for TVs. This would deliver 'accurate' pictures at the press of a button, or even automatically when appropriate source flags were detected.

That preset is Filmmaker Mode. Its approach to protecting creative intent essentially starts with disabling all of the post-processing that typically applied to pictures, alongside preserving correct aspect ratios, colour standards and frame rates.

What a turn off

Filmmaker Mode's list of 'technical specifications' include working to a D65 white point, switching off all motion smoothing/interpolation, only allowing overscanning if it's signalled by an image, and eliminating artificial sharpness and noise reduction.

As imagined at launch (a celebrity-infused affair featuring the likes of Martin Scorsese, Christopher Nolan and J. J. Abrams), Filmmaker Mode would be accessible on TVs in two ways. There would be a dedicated button on the remote control, while TVs could offer the option to have their Filmmaker Modes triggered by specific metadata.

Until recently the second approach was hamstrung by the fact that no sources carried the necessary metadata flags. That changed in November 2021 when Prime Video added Filmmaker Mode flags to its streams, which could be read by compatible LG TVs. We're yet to see any other streamers follow suit, however, and no Blu-rays or 4K Blu-rays currently carry the necessary flags. So most viewers will come across Filmmaker Mode – if their display carries it – by seeing the name within a list of picture presets.

It's available for both standard dynamic range and HDR sources, including the HDR10+ format. But you can't use Filmmaker Mode with Dolby Vision



TV brands including Philips, Hisense, LG, Panasonic, Samsung and Vizio (pictured) have added Filmmaker Mode to their image preset rosters

content, as this is already created using Dolby's own special mastering 'sauce' to optimise playback in line with 'artistic intent'.

LG and Panasonic were Filmmaker Mode's first supporters, but it's now available on TVs from Philips, Samsung, Hisense and Vizio, as well as some BenQ projectors.

Mode for movies

What you can expect from selecting Filmmaker Mode is a picture that resembles the images you'd enjoy if your screen was professionally calibrated. This won't actually appeal to everyone. The picture will look significantly duller than your TV's Standard/default preset (although the UHD Alliance is working on enabling Filmmaker Mode to use a TV's light sensor to compensate for different ambient light levels). There'll be reduced brightness and contrast, and a drop in colour vibrancy. Filmmaker Mode visuals tend to look softer too, and can appear either juddery or blurry with moving content, depending on your TV's core capabilities.


On the upside, as well as showing your support for artistic integrity, your TV will showcase better colour and brightness balance, improved shadow detailing and greyscale management, and smoother colour blends and texture finesse. Pictures won't look processed either, meaning none of the excessive edge ringing associated with low-quality sharpness enhancers; no flickering side effects that low-quality motion processing can cause; and 24fps films no longer looking like cheap soap operas. Ideal for when Tom Cruise pops over to watch a movie ■

Star Wars: The Last Jedi director Rian Johnson spoke at the UHD Alliance's Filmmaker Mode launch (below). The industry body is also the creator of the Ultra HD Premium standard for 4K software and hardware



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'You need more than great panels to build a great TV'

Steve May hears how widespread adoption of 'OLED.EX' panels and new gaming technologies will define Panasonic's 2022 TV range, while its flagship LZ2000 TV ups the audio ante

PANASONIC IS BANKING big on OLED.EX, the new higher-brightness OLED panel technology from supplier LG Display. All of the Japanese company's 2022 OLED sets sport the new glass, including the 42in models it hopes will fly off the shelves. Rival QD OLED technology, as championed by Samsung and Sony, isn't getting a look in.

On the evidence of the models previewed at the brand's 2022 showcase (the sets should be arriving at retailers by the time you read this), its confidence in OLED.EX is well placed. The TVs, from range-topper down, look impressive.

Custom engineering

After Panasonic's plans to develop its own OLED panels, first announced in 2012, were quickly scrapped, it became an early pioneer of customising OLED technology. Back in 2017, it introduced a 3D LUT to combat crushed blacks; this enabled a smoother transition from pure black to near-black, restoring detail previously lost in dark image areas. Then, in 2019, it innovated with the first heat management system, creating extra headroom for picture brightness.

Panasonic marketing guru Paul Williams says that work has continued apace. 'You need more than great panels to build a great TV,' he says. 'You also need the module and SoC [System on a Chip] to work in perfect harmony. All three are equally



Panasonic's Paul Williams says the brand's OLEDs have been adapted to offer higher brightness even in Filmmaker and True Cinema modes

important. Our factory is now using a very sophisticated camera that allows us to carry out pixel-by-pixel uniformity compensation to make sure we're getting the most out of our panels.'

To ensure colour accuracy, the sets continue to be tuned by long-time collaborator and award-winning Hollywood colourist, Stefan Sonnenfeld.

'Our goal,' says Williams, 'is simple: to bring enhanced OLED performance even to our core OLED models.'

Expanded lineup

HCC had an early hands-on with the company's OLED fleet, our first opportunity to see the screens up close after Panasonic's hoped-for return to CES 2022 was dashed by Covid.

The good news is that the after-effects of the pandemic haven't curtailed the company's ambitions. This year will be its biggest OLED roll-out yet, providing more options at a variety of prices.

Topping Panasonic's lineup is the LZ2000, available in 77in, 65in and 55in screen sizes. As with the previous generation, this set is distinguished by an integrated Dolby Atmos sound system, tuned by brand stablemate Technics and identified by the below-screen speaker bar and rear-mounted upfiring drivers.

Yet while the form factor may be familiar, there's an update to this 360° Soundscape audio system,

specifically directional steerage. A new 'Front Array' system, comprising 15 separate drive units, utilises beam forming technology to improve sound imaging nuance, and provide user-selectable modes: Pinpoint, Area and Spot.

The step-down LZ1500 range eschews this multiple speaker design, and is available in 65in, 55in, 48in, and 42in models. Hot on its heels is the LZ1000 (65in and 55in), and the LZ980 (65in, 55in, 48in and 42in). Finally, unique to the UK, is the entry-level LZ800 series. This will be sold exclusively through online retailers at the same sizes as the LZ980, while offering a slightly lower-spec audio system. In short, there should be a Panasonic OLED for all budgets.

While these TVs use the OLED.EX panel technology, there are key differences. Both the LZ2000 and LZ1500 (with the exception of the two smaller models) are designated 'Master OLED Pro', meaning they employ a physical heat sink to enable higher HDR peak brightness.

The 48in and 42in LZ1500s, and the LZ1000 sets, lack the heat sink but earn 'Master OLED' branding due to their superior brightness over the cheaper LZ980 and LZ800.

Taking advantage of the brightness bump that OLED.EX brings, Williams says all models have been custom engineered for higher peak brightness in True Cinema, Cinema, Filmmaker, and Professional modes. The brand has also managed to improve colour volume, specifically blue.

'Using the True Cinema preset, last year's JZ1000 delivered approx 150 nits of brightness, when blue is measured, compared to 214 nits on this year's LZ1000,' says Williams.

'We've been able to expand brightness and more accurately track the PQ curve, so we're capturing all the different levels of gradation within blue. It's about a 40 per cent improvement.'

Other niceties for 2022 include Netflix Adaptive Calibrated mode, which allows the TVs to make dynamic picture adjustments based on ambient room light. Similarly, other viewing modes can take advantage of light sensors to adjust image parameters to suit ambient conditions and content. Consider this an elaboration of the Auto AI mode introduced last season.

Game on!

The eagle-eyed will have noted that Panasonic has been gradually sidling into the game tech space, first with a dedicated soundbar (the 'SoundSlayer'), and then a neck speaker (the GNO1E), both produced in collaboration with software studio Square Enix. This year it has partnered with German e-sports organisation TaKeTV, and introduced improved functionality with Game Mode Extreme.

Here, a new Game Control Board overlay provides real-time info on frame rate, colour, HDR metadata and resolution. For easy access, you'll be able to assign it to a button on the remote, or fire it up through the accompanying app.

A dedicated info screen also allows you to toggle Dark Visibility, VRR and monitor input lag. Of course, adjusting dark visibility flies in the face of Panasonic's



long-touted aim of being true to the creator's vision, but gamers will be gamers. There's also an HDR tone mapping mode, which can be toggled on or off, although the screens do not support the HGiG (HDR Gaming Interest Group) standard.

While Game mode switches off swathes of processing in order to improve response time, various picture presets can be overlaid. Weirdly, Panasonic hasn't come up with any genre specific modes (like FPS or Role Playing) for this, but instead invites you to use the standard picture mode bouquet, including Cinema and Filmmaker Mode. I can't think of any reason a gamer would want to play *Elden Ring* under the shroud of Filmmaker Mode, but maybe I'm out of touch.

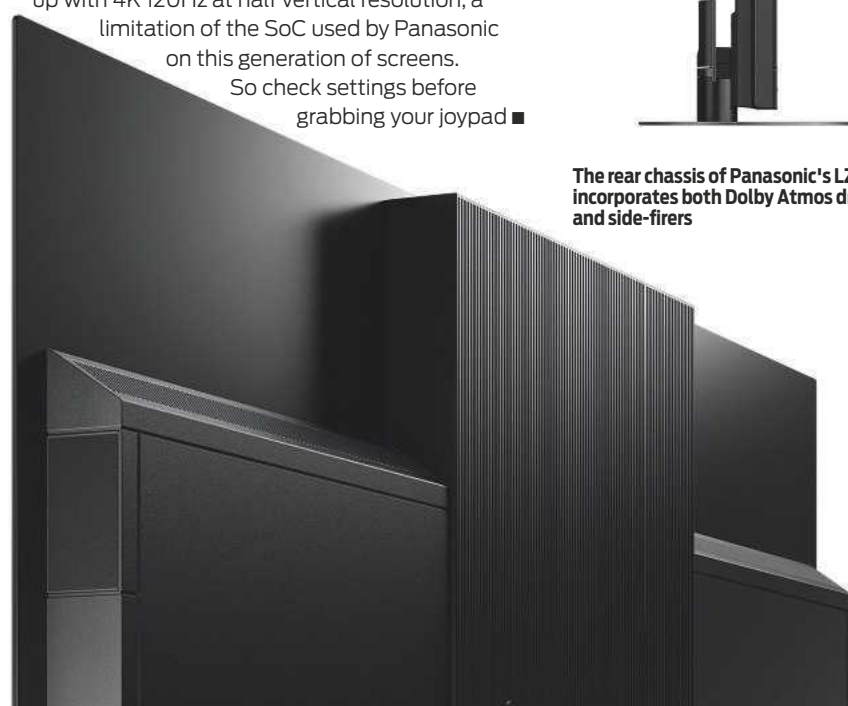
All Panasonic's 2022 OLED models will offer 4K/120 High Frame Rate support, plus Variable Refresh Rate, but only on two of their four HDMI connections. There's also a 4K passthrough mode, which needs to be engaged to ensure full 4K resolution from your games console makes it to screen. If this bypass option isn't used, you'll end up with 4K 120Hz at half vertical resolution, a limitation of the SoC used by Panasonic on this generation of screens.

So check settings before grabbing your joypad ■

An entry-level OLED, the LX800, will be sold exclusively through online retailers



The rear chassis of Panasonic's LZ2000 incorporates both Dolby Atmos drivers and side-firers



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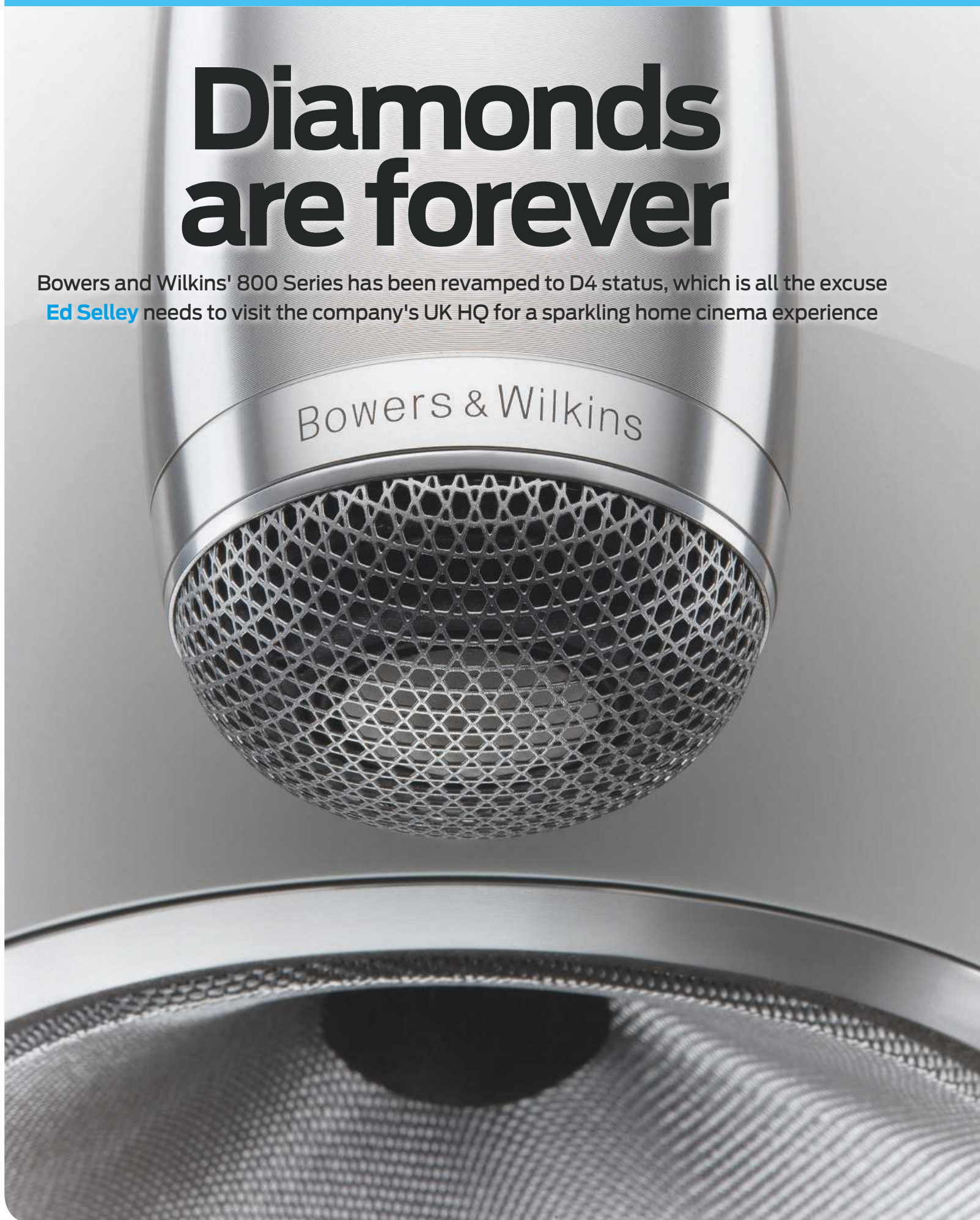
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Diamonds are forever

Bowers and Wilkins' 800 Series has been revamped to D4 status, which is all the excuse **Ed Selley** needs to visit the company's UK HQ for a sparkling home cinema experience



BY THE TIME that loudspeaker manufacturers reach that money-no-object, reference level, many of them focus solely on their hi-fi customers. This is because such models are complex and expensive to produce, and unless you see yourself selling a reasonable quantity of numerous different speakers in a range, the impetus isn't there to make them. Bowers & Wilkins is therefore a little unusual. Its 800 Series is (by a fairly comfortable margin) the best-selling range of 'high-end' loudspeakers on the planet, meaning it has long had the scope to make offering home cinema options worthwhile. And this is why, earlier this year, I found myself down at B&W's HQ, in Worthing, Sussex, to grab a multichannel listen.

The 'D4' series (so called because it's the fourth generation of 800 models to feature a diamond tweeter – the series actually dates back to the 1970s) launched last summer, six years after the previous D3 models rolled out of its UK facility. It comprises one standmount speaker, four floorstanders and two centre channel options, all with price tags that will make your bank manager wince, from the £30,000-per-pair 801 D4 down to the £6,250p/p of the entry 805 standmount, and all have a striking design, sumptuous build quality and the promise of superlative sonics.

Audio as art

Bizarrely, considering these speakers' price points, the D4 series isn't B&W's actual 'flagship'. That remains the company's Nautilus, which looks like a loudspeaker doubling as modern art, or one of H.R. Giger's early *Alien* sketches. Yet many of the engineering principles of that model are continued here; earlier 800 Series speakers informed the Nautilus, and the relationship works two ways.

And one thing the Nautilus doesn't have is that aforementioned diamond tweeter, a 25mm dome hewn from synthetic diamond that's incredibly stiff yet also lightweight, sought-after properties for a high-frequency driver. These domes are housed in Tweeter-on-Top enclosures, a long-running B&W trick that's designed to free the driver from cabinet-born diffraction, as the dome effectively outputs into free space. On the D4s this enclosure is solid aluminium, and has been lengthened to better manage the rear output of the driver. Further refining high-frequency performance is an additional (third) neodymium magnet in the motor assembly, and an improved voice coil design.

Each 800 Series speaker, apart from the two-way 805 D4, then has a dedicated mid-range driver that's 6in or 5.25in depending on model. Here, the cones are made from B&W's proprietary woven Continuum material and, again, there are numerous embellishments below the surface, including a revised mounting/damping system, new silver-plated motor, and something called a Biomimetic suspension, where the previous fabric 'spider' has been replaced by a flexible, more spindly design – a spider's web, if you will – to reduce the air pressure that can affect the mid-range performance.

On the 801 D4s and 803 D4 speakers in use in this system (L/R front and L/R surround), this mid-range

unit is mounted in its own inert aluminium 'turbine head' enclosure, on top of the main cabinet that houses the 'Aerofoil' bass drivers – 10in units in the 801 D4s, and 8in in the £16,000 803s.

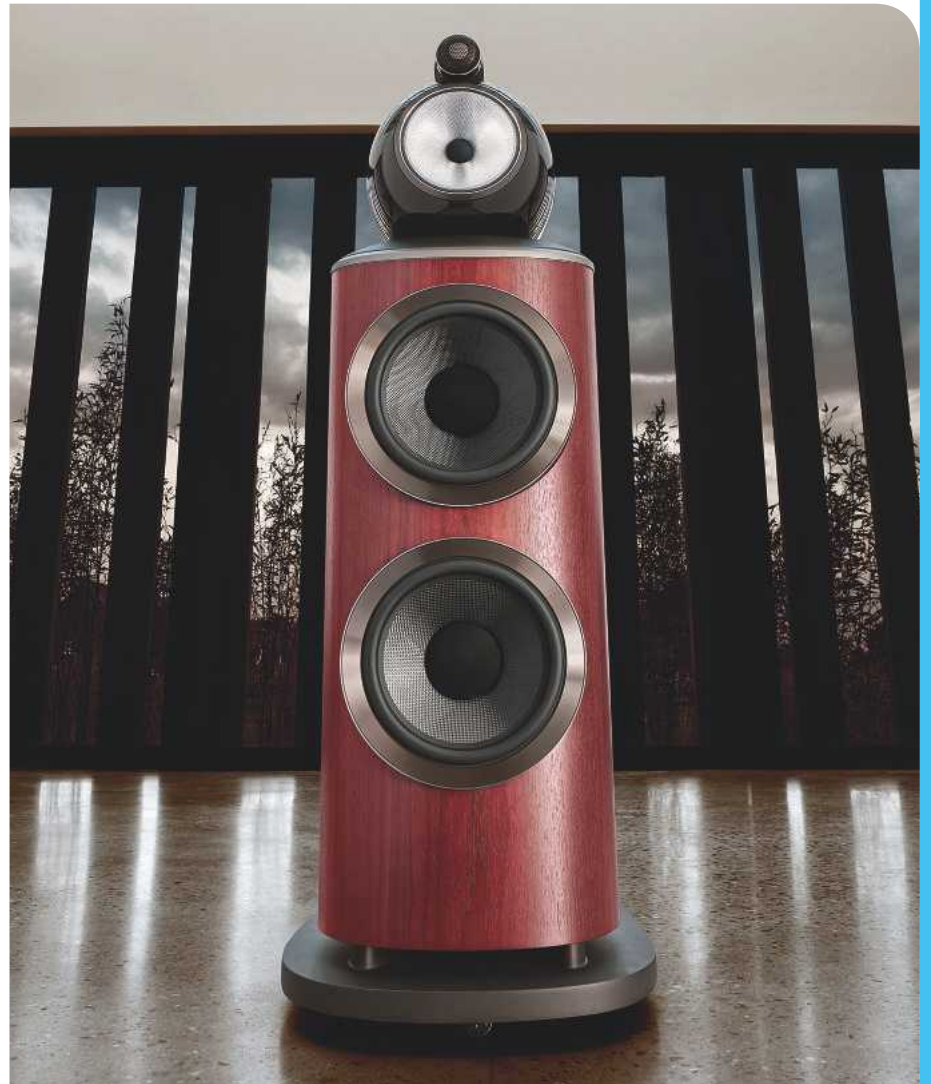
On these floorstanders, crossovers and dual sets of binding posts, which are somewhat confusingly arranged in a negative/positive/positive/negative layout, are fitted to a metal spine at the back that runs the full length of the cabinet. This is to seal it, because the cabinets are made from pressed layers of birch ply formed into immensely strong, wraparound sections, then given internal 'Matrix' bracing made from more birch ply and aluminium.

How low can you go?

The 803 D4 is recognisably a scaled down version of its larger sibling. The £7,500 HTM81 D4 centre obviously looks a lot different, but is also closely related to the 801 D4 and has been designed from the ground up to complement it. It gets the same tweeter and mid-range, although it has to muddle through on 8in bass drivers.

You might expect that, as the 801 D4 has a claimed low-frequency response of 15Hz at +/-3dB, any partnering subwoofer will have its work cut out. Bowers & Wilkins makes the DB1D

The flagship 801 D4 features two 10in bass drivers, a 6in Continuum cone mid-range in aluminium 'turbine head', and diamond dome 'tweeter-on-top'



sub (£4,250), not so much to help the 801 D4 but to ensure that the 'fill' across the LFE channel is consistent. This uses a pair of aerofoil bass drivers – 12in – and a 2,000W Class D amp stage. Reach is suggested at an invigorating 10Hz, so, yes, you can surmise that there should be enough 'fill' for most needs.

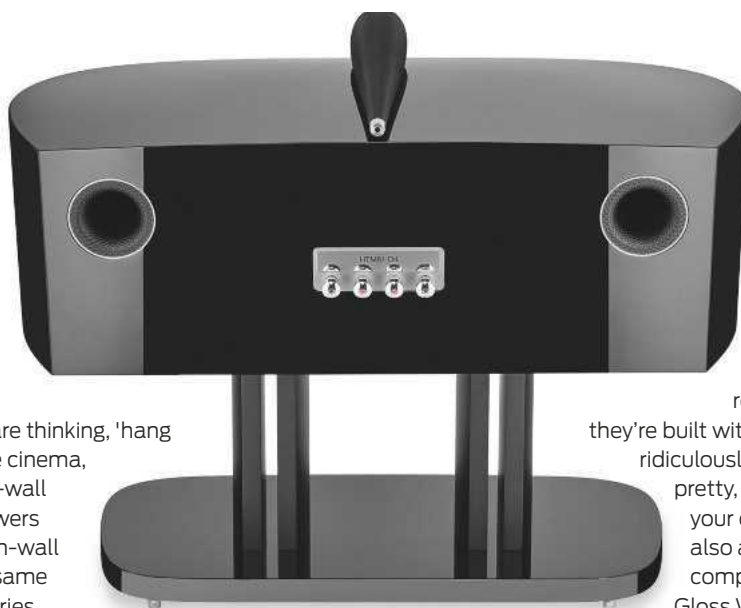
The discreet option

At this point, I'm sure some of you are thinking, 'hang on, if I'm creating a dedicated home cinema, I don't want box speakers, I want in-wall designs.' So I should stress that Bowers & Wilkins has a complete range of in-wall and in-ceiling models that use the same sophisticated drivers as the 800 Series.

This is the reason there is no surround/height/upfiring speaker in the 800 Series (or in any B&W range, actually) and why, in the company's own demonstration room, a quartet of its CCM8.5D in-ceiling speakers (£2,099 a piece) are on hand for Dolby Atmos/DTS:X playback.

Furthermore, if you envisage a system (dream or otherwise) spending as much time playing music as multichannel movie soundtracks, you would need to be a confident soul to believe there is much in the way of in-wall competitors that are going to challenge the 801 D4 as a straight stereo speaker.

This extends to how these speakers are bolted together. I won't insult your intelligence by saying



All the 800 Series Diamond speakers, including the HTM81 D4 centre, support bi-amping via twin speaker terminals

that any member of the 800 Series Diamond is 'cheap' but – and hear me out on this one – they do represent strong value, because their relatively large production volumes allows for efficiencies and processes many of their 'high-end' rivals do not enjoy.

In other words, these speakers are exquisitely finished, even judged at their asking price. There's nothing remotely 'artisan' about them, instead

they're built with an exacting precision and feel ridiculously solid. Perhaps they're not exactly pretty, the 801 D4 looking quite portly, but your eye will be drawn to them. There's also a new Satin Walnut finish to complement the previous Gloss Black, Gloss White and Satin Rosenuot options.

While you can undoubtedly spend big bucks on partnering electronics, Bowers & Wilkins felt confident enough to run the demo of this £65,000 approx system on a Rotel RSP-1576MkII processor (£2,600) and triple-stack of Rotel RB series power amps costing a grand total of £3,500. This isn't exactly bargain basement stuff, but it's still significantly less than the speakers cost.

The spice of life

Whatever the on-paper price imbalance, the results were truly outstanding.

Bowers & Wilkins' claim that the HTM81 D4 centre is a designated driver for the 801 D4 towers was ably demonstrated by the Spice Harvester rescue sequence in *Dune*. The effect as you sit in front of them is not that there are two 801s and a centre, or even that there are three 801s. Instead, you are treated to a vast and cohesive expanse of sound that unpicks the layers of detail in the mix in a way that is forensic but unforced. It doesn't demand you notice the sheer variety of noises that the harvester



B&W's D4 range features four three-way floorstander options, a two-way standmount, and pair of centre speakers



Seen here on the 801 D4, B&W's Matrix bracing combines interlocking wood panels with aluminium reinforcements

makes, or how voices creep in and out of intelligibility, but instead makes them effortlessly perceivable. The sound is just.... there.

And then there's the heft. I am aware of the arguments that a capable subwoofer negates the requirement for every speaker in a system to be full range, but this system is an elegant demonstration that it doesn't hurt if they are.

As you might expect, the movement of effects between the cabinets is gloriously seamless given the commonality of drivers in use but, more than that, when you have surround (and even ceiling speakers) with authentic low-end presence, even with them being cut at 40Hz there is a movement of air beyond the activity of the DB1D. This leaves the subwoofer to fill in the gaps, which it does with all the brilliance you might expect from a 2,000W dual-driver behemoth.

Once upon a time...

Like all truly great AV though, the 800 Series Diamond experience is not only about shock and awe (however much fun that might be). Brad Pitt's drive back to his caravan in *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood* remains one of my favourite test sequences, because it's laden with detail in a understated way. Here, you are in the passenger seat of a Karman Ghia as it makes its time capsule journey through Los Angeles, cocooned by sounds you have at least some recall of in reality – and these B&W speakers nail every single one. The acid test is that you can close your eyes, ignore the image on screen and the sonic world this system builds is still utterly believable. The delicacy and nuance available from these physically imposing speakers is something you'll never get tired of.

And then there are the additional benefits of a speaker package with this much performance prowess. Let me go on record as saying that I don't ever feel I'll be a true fan of music encoded in surround. The move to Dolby Atmos has improved



The DB1D subwoofer's dual-opposed 12in woofers use the same Aerofoil technology as the 10in (pictured) and 8in versions in the 800 Series Diamond

things, as these new mixes feel less forced – they tend to use the additional speakers to build space rather than artificially jam a instrument somewhere it doesn't belong. I still don't always consider the results an improvement, but listening to the phenomenal Atmos mixes of Kraftwerk's *3-D The Catalogue* through this system has been enough to make me a more enthusiastic convert.

The scale that these cabinets create is notable, but that's only half the story. Often, when you listen to a speaker that mounts a 10in woofer, the simple effects of physics give an influence to the sound; a slight sluggishness that stems from the need to get that driver to change direction. The 801 D4, by contrast, has blistering transient speed and the rest of the family is no less adept. This makes the Atmos mix of *Elektro Kardiogram* an absolute riot. Pure, fast seismic bass you feel as well as hear underpins a joyous and wholly engaging experience. Would I swap my eight-LP vinyl boxset of the same material? Probably not, but I'd give it some serious thought.

Movie and music master

And the thing is, the whole purpose of this system is that you don't have to make any such choice. Its performance with multichannel movie material is breathtaking, the sort of delicately wielded force that very few speaker systems on Earth can achieve. Whether you want the explosive drama that redefines the ideal of 'visceral', or to simply capture the most subtle nuance of whispered dialogue, this is a system that delivers. Then, when you don't fancy firing up the projector, B&W's speakers have a mastery of music that very little else can get anywhere near.

It is this all-round ability that sets the 800 Series Diamond apart, and why, if I ever happen to be in the position to spend £65,000 on a loudspeaker package, it would be right at the top of my list ■



BOX OFFICE BOMBS!

25 OF HOLLYWOOD'S COSTLIEST FLOPS...

Big-budget sci-fis, historical epics and even romcoms have lost film studios millions of dollars. But, ask *Anton van Beek* and *Mark Craven*, are some famous filmic failures actually... good?



Battlefield Earth

Mill Creek, US BD

John Travolta's infamous pet project – an adaptation of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard's 1982 sci-fi novel – flared momentarily at the box office (possibly from cinemagoers eager to see how bad it could be) before dropping off a cliff. By the time the intergalactic space dust had settled, indie studio Franchise Pictures had lost over \$50m (and was later sued by investors). Travolta's mid-career resurgence was over, and his plans for a sequel were scuppered. Die-hard sci-fi freaks might be tempted (and there's a US Blu-ray to be picked up), but there's really nothing here you can't get from a few episodes of *Star Trek*.



Blackhat

Universal Pictures, BD

Released in 2015, this techno-thriller remains director Michael Mann's most recent feature film, its commercial failure perhaps drawing a close to his multiplex ambitions (he has, instead, been working on a *Heat* prequel novel). Paltry worldwide earnings of just \$19m meant even a semi-modest budget of \$80m was too much to spend on a tale of a super-hacker (Chris Hemsworth) foiling a global terrorist conspiracy. Yet like *Heat*, *Collateral* and *Miami Vice* before it, *Blackhat* is another of Mann's brilliantly realised thrillers, complete with a trademark 'this is what guns actually sound like' shootout, lashings of jargon-rich dialogue, and typically captivating cinematography. In other words, Mann fans will love it, even if the sometimes noisy digital visuals and denuded colour palette don't do it any AV favours on Universal's Blu-ray.



The Adventures of Pluto Nash

Warner Bros, DVD

Costing a reported \$100m (excluding marketing) and only recouping about a tenth of that at cinemas, 2002's...*Pluto Nash* is a fine example of Hollywood getting it *badly* wrong. A story of an ex-con battling the mobsters who want to take over his nightclub sounds like a gritty crime drama, not a 'zany' sci-fi-comedy set on the moon and starring Eddie Murphy, particularly one with an absence of decent jokes. Gluttons for punishment thinking of tracking down the DVD release (Warner hasn't yet bothered with a Blu-ray outing) should perhaps pay heed to director Ron Underwood: 'The film was not very good.'



Hugo

Entertainment in Video, 3D BD

Between *Shutter Island* and *The Wolf of Wall Street*, Martin Scorsese helmed *Hugo* (2011), his first 'family' film and first (and last) 3D movie. The director proved a master of the form, transforming this enchanting celebration of cinema's early days into a stereoscopic delight – but, with producer Graham King admitting 'no one realised how complicated doing a 3D film was going to be,' is it any wonder the budget hit \$150m? Decent ticket sales and near-unanimous critical praise couldn't stop *Hugo* losing megabucks, but that's no reason not to own it on disc.



Ishtar

Sony Pictures, US BD

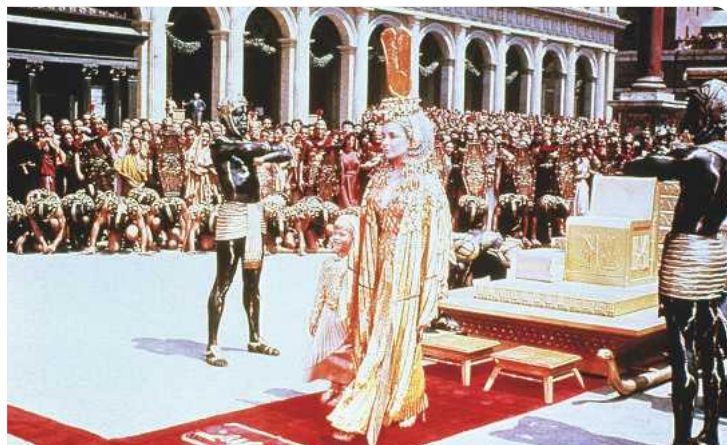
A film now synonymous with the term 'box office flop,' this 1987 adventure-comedy stars Warren Beatty and Dustin Hoffman as two songwriters who unwittingly become involved in a revolution in the titular fictional nation. Better than its reputation suggests, but hardly a laugh-riot all the same, *Ishtar*'s lavish production was beset by numerous problems, leading to costs reaching \$50m – not great considering it made a little over \$14m when released. And its troubles continued as recently as last year when UK label Indicator had to cancel its planned Blu-ray offering due to 'legal complications'.



Cutthroat Island

Lionsgate, US BD

There are films that look great on paper but, for some unexpected reason, don't quite work when they hit the screen. And then there are films like *Cutthroat Island* that make you wonder why anybody thought blowing the best part of \$100m on it was a good idea. Directed by Renny Harlin and starring his then-wife Geena Davis, this swashbuckling adventure suffered original co-star Michael Douglas abandoning ship, and a broken pipe pouring raw sewerage onto the set. Critics could smell blood in the water and, when the film was released, it was met with a wave of negative press. The result was an epic flop, taking just \$10m at the box office and sinking production company Carolco Pictures in the process.



Cleopatra

20th Century Fox, BD

Box office bombs don't always fizzle at theatres. This historical epic, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, was a smash in 1963, pulling in a whopping \$26m at US cinemas. This would be all well and good if it hadn't cost so much to make. Constant script rewrites, a change of directors mid-way through shooting, delays due to the film's leading lady being hospitalised twice (once for meningitis, the second time for pneumonia), and the entire production being relocated – from England to Hollywood and then to Rome – conspired to drive production costs up to an estimated \$44m. *Cleopatra* didn't recoup its money until 1966, when Fox sold TV rights for an unprecedented \$5m, but by then it was already a well-publicised financial disaster and had put a halt to Hollywood's fondness for swords 'n' sandals epics.



John Carter

Disney, BD

Andrew Stanton, director of modern animated classics *Finding Nemo* (2003) and *Wall-E* (2008), entered the live-action arena in 2012 with an adaptation of Edgar Rice Burroughs' sci-fi fantasy novel *A Princess of Mars*. Conceived as the first in a series of films (Burroughs' 'Martian Series' ran to 11 volumes), Disney stumped up a reported \$300m to kickstart what it hoped would be its own *Star Wars*-sized franchise. The fact you're not enjoying *John Carter 6* right now tells you the plan failed. Stanton's passion project, although a good yarn, was undone by poor marketing, including a lack of merchandising and the decision to change the title from *John Carter of Mars*, because of the failure of the previous year's *Mars Needs Moms*. As former Columbia Pictures exec Peter Sealey remarked, 'What the hell is *John Carter*? What's the film about?'



Sorcerer

EntertainmentOne, BD

Director William Friedkin hoped to leave cinemagoers on the edge of their seats with this adaptation of Georges Arnaud's novel *La Salale de la peur* (previously brought to screen in 1953 as *The Wages of Fear*). A thrilling tale of four outcasts driving ageing cases of dangerous explosives across 200 miles of hazardous Colombian terrain, it required a lengthy location shoot which, coupled to Friedkin's perfectionist nature, saw it sail past its original \$15m budget. This in itself wouldn't have been enough to guarantee box office failure, nor would a chorus of negative reviews at the time (ignore them, it's brilliant). What really killed *Sorcerer* was its release in the Summer of 1977, going up against *Star Wars*...



The 13th Warrior

20th Century Fox, BD

Based on a Michael Crichton novel, directed by John McTiernan (*Die Hard*, *Predator*) and featuring hot *Mask of Zorro* star Antonio Banderas, *The 13th Warrior* (1999) probably looked like box office gold for Disney's Touchstone Pictures. Yet the sheen faded as its expensive production spiralled out of control, resulting in reshoots and whopping \$120m loss. Contemporary audiences apparently weren't in the mood for an historical actioner pitting Vikings and Arabian warriors against a mythical creature, but you might be now.



Revolution

BFI, BD

Brit director Hugh Hudson made a major splash with his feature film debut, the 1981 Oscar-winner *Chariots of Fire*, and followed that with *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*, the first Tarzan movie to be nominated for an Academy Award. Could he get similar success with his third feature, 1985's *Revolution*? No. This \$28m historical drama about a fur trapper caught up in the American Revolutionary War was hated by critics and took a mere \$358,574 at the US box office. Its spectacular failure even resulted in leading man Al Pacino giving up film acting for four years.



Raise the Titanic

Network, BD

'It would have been cheaper to lower the Atlantic!' quipped producer Lew Grade about this waterlogged Cold War-era action-adventure. Featuring a mission to salvage rare minerals from the hold of the *HMS Titanic* before those pesky Ruskies get their hands on them, this \$40m would-be blockbuster may have had its origins in a bestselling book by Clive Cussler, but could only score \$7m at the box office. As well as being ignored by audiences, *Raise the Titanic* was loathed by Cussler, who refused to give permission for future film adaptations of his novels – at least until 2005's *Sahara*, which was an even bigger flop.



Deepwater Horizon

Lionsgate, 4K BD

This 2016 movie was inspired by a *New York Times* article about the infamous 2010 oil rig disaster, and originally conceived as an intimate Paul Greengrass-style workplace drama with J.C. Chandor attached to direct. However, the studio preferred a different approach, leading to Chandor exiting and director Peter Berg and actor Mark Wahlberg arriving. 'I believe that the movie-star version of this movie is going to be a more profitable movie,' stated producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura, an opinion that wasn't borne out by this highly enjoyable flick earning roughly \$65m at US cinemas against a huge budget of \$150m. Berg and Wahlberg re-teamed the same year for another ripped-from-the-headlines thriller, *Patriot's Day*, which also performed below studio expectations. Both are brilliant additions to your 4K disc collection, though.



Mortal Engines

Universal, 4K & 3D BD

Peter Jackson co-wrote and produced this adaptation of Philip Reeve's 'Young Adult' fantasy set in a post-apocalyptic world where survivors now live in mobile cities that hunt one another. Unfortunately, while the novel was written in 2001, by the time the \$100m adaptation eventually trundled into multiplexes in 2018, the post-*Twilight* (2008) and *The Hunger Games* (2012) 'Young Adult' movie bubble had well and truly burst. So, just like *The Divergent Series: Allegiant - Part 1* (2016) and *The Darkest Minds* (2018), *Mortal Engines* ran out of steam long before it got close to breaking even. On a positive note, the film did make for very impressive-looking 3D Blu-ray and UHD Blu-ray releases.

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Go figure

The weird world of Hollywood accounting

If there's one thing Tinseltown is good at – other than making films – it's transforming accounting into a labyrinthine art that can prove anything it wants it to. While this is often done to take advantage of tax breaks, it can also be used to deny filmmakers and other creatives a share of any profits.

This is how New Line Cinema could state its *Lord of the Rings* trilogy made 'horrendous losses' while scooping over \$3bn at the global box office, and why the makers of legendary mockumentary *This Is Spinal Tap* sued Studiocanal in 2016 claiming they'd just \$81 in merch income and \$98 in music sales to show for their work on the film.

It's also why Joe Public is never totally sure how costly a flop has been – although if the studio goes bankrupt, that's a good clue.



Swept Away

Fabulous Films, BD

From Prince's *Under the Cherry Moon* to Mariah Carey's *Glitter*, via Michael Jackson's *Moonwalker* and The Spice Girls' *Spice World*, cinema history is littered with duds designed as vehicles for pop stars. Few can hold a candle to Madonna, however, whose *Shanghai Surprise* (1986), *Who's That Girl?* (1987) and *Body of Evidence* (1993) were just teasers for her biggest crime against celluloid, this 2002 remake (helmed by her then-husband Guy Ritchie) of a 1974 Italian romantic adventure flick. Rather than being swept away, audiences stayed away, and the film only made \$1m.



King Arthur: Legend of the Sword

Warner Bros., 4K BD

Speaking of Guy Ritchie (see left), here he is again, this time with a dive into Arthurian legend that reportedly lost Warner Bros. somewhere in the region of \$150m. An origin story, it starred *Pacific Rim*'s Charlie Hunnam as the streetwise man-who-would-be-king, proving his royal lineage by pulling Excalibur from a stone and leading a rebellion against Jude Law's ruthless Vortigern. It ended up playing to mostly empty auditoriums in 2017, meaning plans for a Marvel-style shared universe of Arthurian sequels and spin-offs (*Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Lancelots?*) were nixed.



Heaven's Gate

Second Sight, BD

More than a mere box office dud, the failure of Michael 'The Deer Hunter' Cimino's sophomore feature film – an 1890s-set Western – is credited with bringing an end to the 'director-led' era of Hollywood filmmaking and putting power back in the hands of studios. The legend is that after six days the shoot was already five days behind schedule, and when the film eventually arrived in 1980, in a 219-minute cut, it received such a drubbing from critics that it was pulled from release and edited down to 149 minutes for a 1981 re-release. Even then, it made just \$3.3m against a \$44m budget. The film itself is definitely worth a watch, if a little unconventional for a horse opera.



Doctor Dolittle

Twilight Time, US BD

Rex Harrison's *Doctor Dolittle* may have been able to talk to the animals, but he was unable to talk people into coming to watch his 1967 film. From on-set tension between Harrison and co-star Anthony Newley, to explorer Ranulph Fiennes being so upset about a dam constructed to enlarge a lake that he tried (but failed) to blow it up, everything that could go wrong during production did. And with takings reaching only half the \$17m the film cost to make, and \$200m(!) of merchandise left unsold, *Doctor Dolittle* almost sank 20th Century Fox and killed the Hollywood musical for a time. A non-musical 2020 do-over starring Robert Downey Jr. was another financial disaster.



Gemini Man

Paramount, 4K BD

After dabbling in the world of 120fps filmmaking with the little-seen Billy Lynn's *Long Halftime Walk*, director Ang Lee returned to the tech in 2019 with a film that looked likely to have more mainstream appeal. Featuring Will Smith fighting a younger version of himself, *Gemini Man* was a high-concept sci-fi and hopeful showcase for the wonders of HFR movie-making. As you'd imagine, between the CG effects needed to de-age the actor, and the cutting-edge camera rigs modified for shooting in 3D, it also cost a pretty penny. Industry experts mused it would need to make \$275m to break even, so final takings of \$173m will have given studio Paramount Pictures a headache. *Gemini Man*'s 60fps 4K disc release does look startling, though, and is a must-own for anyone looking to show off their AV setup's capabilities.



Ben-Hur [2016]

Paramount, BD

The 19th century novel *Ben-Hur: A Tale of Christ* had already spawned two money-spinning adaptations (in 1925 and 1959), so another couldn't hurt, right? Wrong. If this \$100m film had been produced a decade earlier, when *Gladiator* was still fresh in audiences' minds, perhaps it might have been a hit. By 2016, however, superheroes were in and revolting slaves were out, and further limiting the film's appeal was a lack of star power (as much as we like Jack Huston, he's no Charlton Heston). Even the vastly expensive chariot race sequence ended up looking cheap due to intrusive CGI.



The Alamo

Disney, R2 DVD

Horse movie *Hidalgo* and 'toon *Home on the Range* both underperformed for Disney in 2004, yet at least they weren't this period war drama. *The Alamo* had been in development at the studio since the '90s, Ron Howard and Russell Crowe linked to a version that was deemed too expensive. Ironically, the movie that did arrive lacked both a famous director or any major stars (Billy Bob Thornton and Dennis Quaid were as good as it got), but somehow blew a budget of \$107m. It floundered in the US, and was dumped on video in most other territories. Remember *The Alamo*? Probably not.



Town & Country

Entertainment in Video, R2 DVD

A tonally uneven romcom starring Warren Beatty, Charlton Heston, Diane Keaton and Goldie Hawn, *Town & Country*'s production woes (including the shoot grinding to a halt for a year, and repeated rewrites) resulted in it costing only around \$3m less to make than *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. To the surprise of no one, it was the heroic hobbits who triumphed in cinemas in 2001, while this became yet another of Beatty's misfires, and one of the biggest bombs of the decade.



Stealth

Sony Pictures, BD

A weird mash-up of *Top Gun*, *Short Circuit* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Stealth* stars Josh Lucas, Jessica Biel and Jamie Foxx as Navy pilots trying to stop an unmanned AI-powered fighter jet that goes 'rogue' after being struck by lightning. Directed by Rob 'xXx' Cohen, the production budget of this relentlessly idiotic actioner was an inexplicable \$135m, and after it failed to take off at cinemas it was estimated to have lost Sony Pictures around \$125m in total. Today, *Stealth* is chiefly remembered by AV-hedz for being an early arrival on 2006's shiny new Blu-ray format.



The Mummy

Universal Pictures, 4K BD

In 2014 Universal announced it would reboot its classic movie monsters in an interwoven cinematic franchise dubbed the 'Dark Universe'. So confident of success, it got Danny Elfman to write a musical theme and released a publicity photo of some of the big-name stars attached to films under development.

Three years later came the first Dark Universe film, a mega-budget action-adventure-fantasy pitting Tom Cruise against a reanimated Egyptian princess. It earned around \$410m, but even this wasn't enough to offset the cash spent on both the movie and the whole Dark Universe hoopla. The studio then quickly scrapped the idea, eventually letting Blumhouse Productions make *The Invisible Man* (2020) instead, and presumably sighing when it earned \$143m on a budget of just \$7m. Whoops.



The Postman

Warner Bros., BD

Kevin Costner indulged his saviour complex once again in this \$80m vanity project, directing and starring in a post-apocalyptic neo-Western about a mysterious drifter who dons the uniform of a US postal worker. Moseying into cinemas just a couple of years after 1995's unfairly derided *Waterworld*, this turgid and mawkish three-hour blend of *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* and *Dances with Wolves* is a second-class stamp of a movie, with not a single action scene of note to spark the interest of bored viewers. Thankfully, very few got to learn this for themselves as – unlike *Waterworld*, which did eventually turn a profit thanks to home video and TV rights sales – *The Postman* was only able to deliver \$21m in ticket sales. Warner Bros. would probably have returned to sender if it could... ■

Let's get digital!



This 11.8.8-channel cinema combines Meridian Audio DSP active loudspeakers with a DCI-compliant Barco 4K projector, writes **Mark Craven**

KIT CHECKLIST

MERIDIAN: 2 x Digital Theatre 271 Controllers; 9 x DSP750 loudspeakers for LCR configuration; 3 x DSP730 (front height); 8 x DSP750 (surround and rear); 5 x DSP730 (overheads); 8 x DSW600 in-wall subwoofers; 1 x 218 Zone Controller

TRINNOV: Altitude32 processor

BARCO RESIDENTIAL: Freya+ DCI 4K projector

DISPLAY TECHNOLOGIES: 4.3m-wide Dynamic 2TB masking projector screen (1.78:1 ratio), with Side Mirror Mount XL

C-ATS: Acoustic treatments (absorption and diffusion)

KALEIDESCAPE: Terra server

PANASONIC: Ultra HD Blu-ray player

APPLE: Apple TV 4K

SKY: Sky Q

SONY: PlayStation 5



The King's Man

Aided by secret network of servants, a British aristocrat works in the shadows to stop a cadre of villains bent on world war.



A PROJECT FROM Guildford-based Surrey Hills Home Cinemas, this ten-seater dedicated theatre features a kit list that feels high-end even for the luxury custom install market. Completed in collaboration with DbM (Distributed by Meridian), it combines an immersive 11.8.8-channel sound system with 4.3m-wide 4K HDR images.

All loudspeakers are in-wall and in-ceiling models from Meridian Audio's digital active DSP range, meaning no need for outboard amplifiers, and the setup follows the company's High Power Array principle, using trios of the DSP750s model for each channel in the LCR stage. The result, says Meridian, is optimum output and dispersion for an even response at any listening position.

Processing is via a Trinnov Altitude32, while a DCI-compliant Barco Freya+ projector provides image quality to match the premium sonics.

'This was our chance to build the ultimate home cinema and listening room' says Surrey Hills Home Cinemas' Elliot Hicks. '[It] needed to be able to perform to the highest standard, whether the family were watching Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* or listening to a Chopin piano recital.'

The cinema has the Kaleidescape system beloved of the pro install world, but with other sources including Sky Q, Apple TV, a PlayStation 5 and even a Laserdisc player, the owner is never likely to run out of entertainment. If we had this room, we'd probably never leave ■

A. C-ATS the idea

The room hides sound diffusion and absorption panels from acoustic treatment specialist C-ATS

B. Triple whammy

The front wall is practically all projector screen, and behind it reside the nine Meridian Audio DSP750s in-wall speakers that make up the LCR stage

C. Up, down and all-around

Lighting touches include downlighters, LED strip around the coffer, and a star ceiling



D. Bring your friends

There's comfy, reclining seating for ten in this large basement space

E. Mirror image

Barco's large-chassis Freya+ 4K DLP projector delivers a rated brightness of 13,500 Lumens that's ideal for HDR playback on super-size screens. It's located in the soundproofed kit room behind the cinema, firing off an XL Side Mirror Mount

F. Smallscreen entertainment?

There are numerous other AV zones throughout the property, including this media room with 83in Sony OLED TV and (again) Meridian Audio speakers

G. Whole lotta hardware

The rack system includes Kaleidescape movie server/playback gear, Trinnov Altitude32, Meridian controllers, Panasonic DP-UB9000 disc spinner and Lumagen Radiance Pro video processor





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Home Cinema Alliance

High-end, below stairs



Hidden from view in this subterranean cinema is an expansive Dolby Atmos system with no fewer than six subs, reports Daniel Sait

KIT CHECKLIST

WISDOM AUDIO: 7 x Sage Cinema Line 2; 2 x L75i; 6 x S90i subwoofers; 8 x ICS7A (height); 11 x SA3 (3 x 500W) rack amplifiers

STORM AUDIO: ISP 32 Mk2 processor

JVC: DLA-NX9 native 4K/8K upscaling projector

DISPLAY TECHNOLOGIES: Custom 3.4m-wide, 2.35:1 aspect ratio projector screen

KALEIDESCAPE: Strato S movie player

APPLE: Apple TV 4K

HUMAX: Humax Freesat PVR

MICROSOFT: Xbox Series X

OPPO: UDP-203 4K Blu-ray player

CRESTRON: TSR-310 remote; control system

A. Twinkle, twinkle

A starfield stretches across almost the entire ceiling, and hides the room's Dolby Atmos speakers

B. Movies at the ready

A Kaleidescape system provides the main source for watching movies, but there are also Oppo 4K BD and Humax Freesat sources on tap

C. On the canvas

This 3.4m-wide projector screen, custom made by UK brand Display Technologies, adopts a 2.35:1 ratio for film-centric viewing >



WITH A 9.6.8 speaker system from premium brand Wisdom Audio, plus a 3.4m-wide screen and JVC's 8K upscaling projector on imaging duty, it's easy to see why Chris Knight, the managing director of installer Perfect Integration, believes the basement cinema his company has created is 'something very special.'

Part of a luxury home automation project, the 6.5m x 4.3m build required custom soundproofing (as the cinema sits directly below where people live and sleep), precise modelling of speaker and seating placement, and attention to aesthetic detail – there's a modern-

looking star ceiling, plus art deco touches, including on-wall lighting, that bring to mind film theatres of the Golden Age.

The Wisdom Audio speakers include the brand's Sage Cinema Line 2 model, which combines six woofers with 24 planar magnetic drive units in a line-array chassis, the resulting sound dispersion ideal for multi-row seating. All are out of sight, as are the room's six subwoofers. A 24-channel Storm Audio ISP processor handles sound delivery, fettled by Dirac Live calibration. Perfect Integration also calibrated 2.0 and 2.2 settings for music listening ■



D. Timber land

Wooden panelling on the curved side walls provides one of the key aesthetic elements, and brings a modest amount of audio diffusion

E. Up front

The main row of cinema seating has room for four. Latecomers have to make do with the bar-style counter behind...

F. A word to the wise

One of the kit racks in the adjacent bootroom is almost entirely devoted to the cinema's eleven Wisdom Audio power amplifiers, each providing three channels of 500W

G. Pretty in pink

Entry to the underground cinema is via a foyer area, complete with neon welcome sign. A Crestron control system provides easy operation of the room's AV and lighting





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The 2022-23 EISA Awards will be announced on August 15th 2022



REVIEWS

→ **HARDWARE** **ANTHEM** AVM 90 15.4-channel flagship processor **SAMSUNG** 75in Neo QLED TV dazzles with its Mini LED performance **PHILIPS** Mid-range 'The One' 55in LCD TV **LG** HU715Q ultra-short-throw projector with WebOS **SONUS FABER** Italian brand enters the wireless speaker arena **BENQ** X3000i 4K DLP projector **B&W** Panorama 3 soundbar & MORE!

French fancies

Triangle's Borea series loudspeakers pack a cinematic punch alongside their musical bent. Add in the affordable price tags and we're all ears – see p60.



HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

Steve Withers has an object-audio ball with Anthem's most sophisticated AV processor yet



Flagship processor worth waiting for

Anthem's AVM 90 has been a long time coming, but it heralds the completion of the Canadian manufacturer's upgraded AV lineup. And while first announced in October 2020, the delayed arrival of this top-of-the-range processor hasn't seemed to harm it. Rather, it means Anthem has been able to offer HDMI 2.1 compatibility out of the box, certainly a demanded feature when a product sells for a cool £6,749.

This new flagship processor joins the previously released AVM 70 (HCC #326), and a trio of AV receivers: the MRX 1140; the mid-range MRX 740 (HCC #321); and the entry-level MRX 540. While the receivers have their own built-in grunt, the processors can be partnered with Anthem's matching power amps: the two-channel

MCA 225, the three-channel MCA 325, and the five-channel MCA 525.

No stone left unturned

Now, the AVM 90's asking price is admittedly a sizable chunk of cheddar, but backing it up is an uncompromising approach, with a discrete 15.4-channel experience – Dolby Atmos, DTS:X, and IMAX Enhanced – on the menu.

At this point you might be thinking, should I instead look to the AVM 70 and save myself

three grand? Well you could, but there are a number of important differences between these two models.

First of all, while both support the main object-based audio formats, the AVM 90 decodes and processes them using a total of 19 channels with four independent subwoofers. If that sounds like overkill, I'll explain why four

subs are a useful addition later in the review. But basically, it means you can run a fully discrete and insanely immersive 9.4.6-channel system.

The AVM 90 also features a comprehensively overhauled interior, and one that Anthem believes represents the 'culmination of everything we know'. A new 32-bit/768kHz ESS Sabre DAC stage applies

'The entire signal path has been upgraded with op-amps and resistors chosen for their low distortion'

conversion to all 19 channels, while an 'oversized, high-efficiency' toroidal power supply is employed to help isolate 'high power signals' from the critical audio circuits.

Anthem further states the processor's entire signal path has been upgraded, with op-amps and resistors chosen for their distortion limiting capabilities. It also says that as the 'complexity and density' of its design grew, it required the use of new isolated circuit boards. All this under-the-bonnet soldering and fettling 'allowed our engineers the freedom to ensure every channel has a unique, low cross-talk and pristine signal path.'

Finally, the AVM 90 gets a 1.6GHz dual-core DSP platform, featuring a 32-bit floating-point audio data path and 64-bit floating-point computation and double-precision filter states. If all that techno-babble is a bit of a mouthful, it basically means the AVM 90 will be able to get the most out of Anthem's superb ARC Genesis room correction software.

HDR in all flavours

Connectivity has also been upgraded. Ranged along the top of the processor's rear panel are seven HDMI 2.1 inputs and three corresponding outputs. This not only means the AVM 90 supports eARC, HDCP 2.3 and 8K/60 video, it also passes HDR10, HLG, HDR10+ and Dolby Vision, which I'd argue is essential for a unit at this price. Meanwhile, hardcore gamers can geek out on the support for 4K/120, ALLM, QFT, QMS, and VRR.

In fairness, Anthem's new HDMI 2.1 board will also be offered



as an upgrade for the AVM 70 (and Anthem's AV receivers) later this year, although the exact pricing and timing has yet to be announced.

From the outside the AVM 90 looks identical to all the other products in Anthem's refreshed lineup, with the same minimalist styling and two-tone finish. On the glossy side you'll find the TFT display, while the matte side houses some basic controls and a 6.3mm headphone jack.

Things are also very similar at the rear, although the AVM 90 obviously has two more sub outputs compared to the AVM 70. As a result, you get 15.4-channel balanced XLR outputs, along with matching (and unbalanced) RCA outputs for those who'd rather use phono connectors.

HDMI ports aside, the other physical connections are identical with five analogue inputs (including a phono stage for any vinyl freaks), three optical digital inputs, and a pair of coaxial digital inputs. In addition, there's an IR input and 12V triggers, along with RS232 and IP control capabilities.

Wireless connectivity is also the same, with stable Wi-Fi and Bluetooth thanks to a pair of large antenna. You also get support for Apple AirPlay 2, Google Chromecast, and Spotify Connect. Roon Ready status is due soon.

Anthem's standard backlit remote is great for day-to-day control, but the excellent web user interface is my preferred choice for initial setup

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 15.4-channel Dolby Atmos AV processor with ARC Genesis EQ

POSITION: Flagship processor model in Anthem's AV lineup

PEERS: Marantz AV8805A; Arcam AV40; JBL Synthesis SDP-55

1. Controls and headphone socket lurk on the matte side of the AVM 90's fascia

2. Anthem's full-width chassis is side- and top-vented for heat management





because it lays everything out in a comprehensive and intuitive fashion. Custom installers will also be glad to learn there's support for all the third-party control solutions.

Easy installation

Considering its inherent sophistication, the AVM 90 is surprisingly easy to install, with the main setup decisions relating to the speaker layout and the number of overall channels. This brings us to one of the AVM 90's main selling points – four independent subs.

Contrary to popular opinion, the use of more than one subwoofer doesn't mean overwhelming bass. Instead you get a more balanced infrasonic response, because the multiple subs help smooth out peaks and dips caused by standing waves in the room. As a general rule of thumb, the best results will be achieved by putting a sub in each room

corner, and while this approach will make a big difference, the AVM 90 also has the ability to use ARC Genesis to correct all four subwoofers individually for their frequency response, time alignment, and phase alignment. The result ought to be a supremely coherent bass delivery around the entire soundstage.

Anthem Room Correction (ARC) remains a fantastic in-room acoustic measurement and optimisation tool that allows you to engineer the sonic environment to create a tonally balanced system that can steer sounds seamlessly from channel to channel. ARC runs on Windows or Mac, and Anthem includes a calibrated microphone and stand, making room correction a doddle.

For the purposes of this review I ran a 9.2.6-channel system driven by a Storm Audio PA16 MK2 16-channel power amplifier, but sadly I'm limited to two independent



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subs at the front because architects have an annoying habit of putting doors in the corners of rooms.

Class performer

While I wasn't able to enjoy the full benefits of a four-subwoofer config, the AVM 90's sonic prowess was immediately obvious. This is a class performer right out of the gate, and running through my usual object-based palette cleansers revealed a wonderfully tight and controlled soundfield.

'The steering was so precise, and the channels so distinct, that I could follow noises moving within a sonic bubble'

Midway (4K BD) sounded especially good, particularly during the climactic battle. This is a dense and complex Atmos soundtrack, but the Anthem picked out the individual audio objects with unerring accuracy. Whether it was flak exploding overhead, tracer fire ripping across the room, or planes flying right through you, each sound effect was precisely, thrillingly defined. The overall mix never once collapsed into an acoustic mush.

Joining this sense of clean detail is the three-dimensionality of the AVM 90's delivery. It completely immerses you within the soundstage, objects moving with incredible fluidity and the various channels perfectly defined. Dialogue and score have exceptional clarity.

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes **DTS:X:** Yes **IMAX ENHANCED:** Yes **MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** No **MULTICHANNEL PRE-OUT:** Yes, 15.4 XLR and phono **MULTIROOM:** Yes, Zone 2 **AV INPUTS:** 5 x digital audio (3 x optical and 2 x coaxial); 5 x analogue stereo **HDMI:** 7 x inputs and 3 x outputs **VIDEO UPSCALING:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 432(w) x 364(d) x 152(h)mm **WEIGHT:** 10.1kg

FEATURES: Built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth; Chromecast and AirPlay 2; Spotify Connect; Roon support; web-based user interface; ARC (Anthem Room Correction) Genesis; calibrated microphone and stand; IR input; 12V triggers; Ethernet; USB port (service only); RS232 serial connector; third party integration and IP control; ESS Sabre 32-bit/768kHz DAC; HDMI 2.1 with support for eARC, HDCP 2.3, 8K/60, 4K/120, VRR, ALLM, QFT, QMS, HDR10, HLG, HDR10+ and Dolby Vision

TESTED WITH



MONSTER HUNTER: This ludicrous but enjoyable video game adaptation from Paul W. S. Anderson may be heavy on monsters and light on plot, but it looks and sounds fantastic on Sony Pictures' Ultra HD Blu-ray. If you're searching for a film with unsociable levels of bass, hunt down this infrasonic beast.

While I only had my notes and memory to rely on, the AVM 90's orchestration of *Midway*'s dynamic soundtrack felt superior to that of its already impressive sibling, the AVM 70. Everything snapped a little more into focus.

Monster Hunter (4K BD) uses deep bass to devastating effect, and this processor not only served up subterranean infrasonic moments in a controlled, balanced and precise manner, but integrated them flawlessly with the other speakers in the array. The result was that low-end effects felt reinforced, regardless of where they were positioned around the room. Whenever a monster appears, which is fairly regularly, the lows kick in and often drop well below 20Hz. This sounded stunning – bass you can literally feel in your chest, without bloom or blur.

Turn to a more inventive soundmix, such as the DTS:X soundtrack of *Crimson Peak* (Blu-ray) and the AVM 90 doesn't falter, bringing the environment of Allerdale Hall vividly to life. The house is full of subtle sonic cues, and the sound team uses audio objects to move these around a hemisphere of sound. The Anthem's steering was so precise, and the channels so distinct, that I could follow noises moving within this sonic bubble, such as the water flowing constantly through the heating pipes.

Raising the bar

Anthem's AVM 90 is an undoubted audio triumph. In fact, the performance is so good it comes close to matching ultra-high-end processors costing twice as much. The addition of HDMI 2.1 is welcome, and Auro-3D decoding appears to be about the only thing missing from this otherwise feature-rich processor. This doesn't just elevate the sound quality of any system it's included in, it also raises the bar of what's possible at this price ■

3. Outputs – all 19 of them – are provided on both unbalanced RCA and balanced XLR

4. For matching speakers, Anthem would no doubt suggest its sister brand Paradigm...

HCC VERDICT



Anthem AVM 90

→ £6,749 → www.anthemav.com

WE SAY: Anthem's high-end processor has a fulsome feature list – including HDMI 2.1 and ARC Genesis calibration – and delivers a state-of-the-art performance. Simply brilliant.

VROOOOM!
Car caper *Drive* hits
the road on a new
4K Blu-ray, p93



The native 8K resolution of Samsung's 75in TV is just the start of its attractions, reckons **John Archer**

Big TV makes a big impression

Great as the excitement is this year surrounding Samsung's debut QD OLED TVs – the first 'self-emissive' displays from the Korean company in close to a decade – it still determinedly sees Mini LED as its top-flight TV technology. And on the evidence of the flagship 75in QE75QN900B, it has a point. This TV is good enough to have you wondering if your budget will stretch to its premium price tag.

How premium? Well, the 75QN900B has launched at £7,799. Samsung's 65in QD OLED 65S95B, by comparison, only costs £3,400 despite its new screen technology. So how does this model, apart from those extra ten inches, justify costing more than twice as much?

For starters, it looks incredible. Samsung's king-sized screen sits in an astonishingly slim frame, and at the front of a much slimmer rear than on last year's equivalent model. This rear is essentially flat, creating a gorgeous monolithic feel, and the side panels are finished in a neat perforated metal finish.

To help preserve its minimalist elegance, the TV ships with an external connections box that transports sound, pictures and power to the screen via a single cable. This box can slot onto the 75QN900B's desktop support neck if you're not wall-hanging your new telly.

Also contributing to the set's flagship status is its 8K resolution, offering four times as many pixels as 4K. There remains precious little native 8K content in the world, but the remarkable upscaling offered by Samsung's latest AI-bolstered video processor (which has been improved yet again for 2022, not least by the addition of 14-bit colour/greyscale processing) can make 4K sources look better than they do on a regular 4K display.

The processor in the 75QN900B is specially optimised for 8K, and draws on the combined learning of 20 separate neural networks when deciding how best to present any incoming image.

Zonal marking

The most important specification 'step up' from Samsung's premium QN95B 4K model (HCC #330) comes with its Mini LED lighting system. Quick recap: by using tiny LEDs that are barely one

fortieth the size of conventional ones, Samsung has been able to fit far more of them behind the screen. And the more individual LEDs you have, the more you can do with them. On the 75QN900B, however, they're combined with a local dimming solution that allows 1,920 separate sections of the Mini LEDs to output their own independent light levels. That's 1,200 more zones than on the QN95B, all again supported by Samsung's Shape Adaptive Light Control engine, which adjusts the way the light peaks and fades within each light zone.

Like its 4K sibling, this model uses metal-clad Quantum Dots to deliver its colours, and in partnership with the Mini LED lighting delivers a mind-boggling 4,000 nits-plus of brightness on a 10 per cent white HDR window.

Banging the drum

Gamers are well served by this 8K behemoth. It can keep input lag, for instance, to just 10ms. There's also a Game Bar screen that shows key image info and adjustments, and all four of the TV's HDMI inputs support 4K at 120Hz and variable refresh rates, including FreeSync Premium Pro.

While the smart system is the same richly populated but frustratingly counter-intuitive affair found on Samsung's QN95B, this flatscreen further bangs the flagship drum with its audio system. Dolby Atmos decoding plays footsie with a premium version of Samsung's Object Tracking Sound system, where speakers are built around the TV's frame to deliver precise detail placement. In the 75QN900B's case, this OTS implementation is a 6.2.4-channel speaker configuration, with more potent amplification.

These audio specs help to deliver a soundstage that feels both larger and more precise than the QN95B. Action scenes in the 4K Blu-ray of *Uncharted*, including the opening plane

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
75in TV with Mini LED lighting and an 8K native resolution

POSITION:
The QN900B is Samsung's premium TV series for 2022

PEERS:
LG 77OLEDZ2;
Sony XR-75Z9K

1. This upgraded 8K Mini LED uses 1,920 dimming zones

2. The TV's 75in panel is supported by a robust central stand



sequence, enjoy a strong sense of scale, spreading the sound far beyond the TV's borders. At the same time, in-image effects such as gunshots and dialogue all sound not just locked to the screen, but locked to the correct part of the screen. And unlike many Samsung TVs, the sound

'Treasure gleams brightly against dark backgrounds, and the shafts of sunlight that erupt look dazzling'

just about keeps expanding to accommodate the loudest climaxes of *Uncharted*'s action scenes, rather than giving up halfway through.

HDR sparkle

But it's the pictures we're really interested in, and these are almost brutally brilliant.

The impact of those 4,000 nits is immediately noticeable in fullscreen bright HDR shots, such as the revisited plane sequence in *Uncharted*'s latter stages, which look more like natural daylight than I've seen on any other set.

Peak brightness highlights, such as the sun hitting the waves in the Banda Sea, or the lights in the plane's cargo hold, also benefit. It's a shame the QN900B doesn't support the Dolby Vision master the *Uncharted* 4K BD carries, but you can hardly say it doesn't deliver serious HDR sparkle.

And while the TV outguns Samsung's already stellar QN95B in both these brightness-related respects, it most makes its flagship status pay in the intensity with which it's able to reproduce small bright highlights within predominantly dark scenes. In *Uncharted*, as Sully and Nathan search the hidden galleons, the treasure they find gleams exceptionally brightly against the dark backgrounds, and the shafts of sunlight that occasionally erupt through the old timbers look dazzling.

What's more, the huge number of dimming zones means there's hardly ever so much as a hint of backlight clouding or blooming. In short, you get ultra deep, inky black levels almost as good as anything you might get from an OLED TV, together with incredibly intense highlights and peak brightness levels.

Colours enjoy huge volumes and intensity, especially when using the hard-to-resist Standard picture preset. The gemstones littered throughout *Uncharted* look all the more enticing, while the expanded colour gamut you get with almost all HDR content has never been more explosively obvious.

Crucially, though, colours aren't just rich. They also retain more than enough subtlety to keep picture areas looking real rather than cartoonish – something which ensures you get that three-dimensional feeling associated with the best 4K experiences. In fact, watching a good 4K transfer like *Uncharted* actually feels like an 8K experience, thanks to the sense of definition, realism and depth.

SPECIFICATIONS

4K: Yes. Actually 8K (7,680 x 4,320 resolution) **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG; HDR10+ **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; Freesat HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; Ethernet; optical audio **4K/120 PLAYBACK:** Yes **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 90W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,654.8(w) x 945.6(h) x 15.4(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 31.7kg

FEATURES: Wi-fi; USB multimedia playback; Bluetooth headphone support; Mini LED lighting with 1,920 dimming zones; Shape Adaptive Light Control; QLED (Quantum Dot) technology; OTS+ Sound system; Q Symphony for joining forces with Samsung soundbars; Game Bar

TESTED WITH



UNCHARTED: A solid enough action adventure film inspired by a videogame, and on a 4K Blu-ray with a typically sparkling transfer from Sony. There's sharpness, detail and texture galore, backed up by crisp HDR (including Dolby Vision, which sadly isn't supported on the 75QN900B...) and a punchy Dolby Atmos soundmix.



While Samsung's default motion settings are a bit of a mess, creating too many unwanted digital side effects, with a little manipulation – try Custom mode with blur and judder reduction set to three or four – motion can look quite crisp and authentic.

Fast and fluid

As for gaming, this was the most fun I've ever had from a TV. An incredibly fast response time, plus peerless levels of brightness, fluidity and detail, made *Elden Ring*'s incredible open world

look even more darkly beautiful, and *Call of Duty*'s fast-paced environments feel even more claustrophobic.

Caveats are those default motion processing issues, backlight blooming becoming apparent if you have to watch from an angle, and the need for some tinkering with the presets – the generally most watchable Standard setting can crush detail out of dark areas, so you might want to tinker with the Contrast Enhancer feature, or switch to the less dynamic-feeling Movie or Filmmaker Mode options. Also, low-quality HD sources do look a bit soft once they've been upscaled to 8K.

These picture flaws are mostly either avoidable with a little adaptation, or scarcely seen at all. So while there's stronger competition than ever from the OLED world, for sheer, unadulterated home cinema spectacle, the 75QN900B is in a class of its own ■

3. Arranged around the QN900B's bezel is a multichannel Object Tracking Sound (OTS) system

HCC VERDICT



Samsung QE75QN900B

→ £7,799 → www.samsung.com/uk

WE SAY: If you can afford it, the QE75QN900B delivers an awe-inspiring mix of brightness that only an LCD TV can achieve – and black levels no LCD TV has any right to achieve.

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– Homeowner, Lapworth

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AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Premium single-box
Dolby Atmos
soundbar

POSITION:
Third-generation of
B&W's standalone
soundbar joining the
previous multiroom
Formation Bar

PEERS:
Sonos ARC;
Bluesound Pulse
Soundbar+

This neat all-in-one soundbar excels with music and big movie audio, says [Steve May](#)

Third time's the charm for B&W

Bowers & Wilkins' Panorama 3 soundbar may not come with a subwoofer, but it still drops deep. I've got *Bad Guy* booming out, and the bass beat on this Billie Eilish 'banger' is brutal. The instrumentation is minimal, but the 'bar still spreads it wide, musical flourishes placed far apart. It's a reassuringly raunchy musical performance for what is ostensibly a home cinema product aimed at the no-fuss streaming movie market.

Self evidently the third iteration of B&W's flagship soundbar, it's unquestionably the best. The first Panorama launched back in 2009, the second model some four years later, its reappearance blessed with an HDMI connection for the first time.

This latest addition is the first to embrace Dolby Atmos (but not DTS:X), and it's a game-changing refinement. Spatial audio, be it straight Atmos, or an upscale of 5.1 or stereo source material, allows this speaker to sound larger and more impressive – but you'll need a big TV to partner it.

At 1,210mm wide, the Panorama 3 is a sizable beast. Ideally, you wouldn't want to use it with anything smaller than a 65in screen. You'll need wide AV furniture too, unless you intend to wall mount, for which a bracket is included in the box. The 'bar weighs a significant 6.5kg.

As you'd expect from the manufacturer, build quality and finish is excellent. There are pleasing angles to its chassis that help it appear sleeker than it actually is. The soundbar's forward-facing driver array is hidden behind an acoustic fabric wrap, while the top plate is perforated metal – you can just about see the upfiring height drivers if you squint.

At the centre of the 'bar is a capacitive touchpanel with proximity sensor that causes the display to light up when your digits approach. A quick wave reveals volume controls, a multifunction source select button and power.

In total, the Panorama 3 uses 13 drivers, including two 4in low-frequency units for deeper bass, and a pair of Dolby Atmos upfiring glass fibre cones, each bunkered in an individual acoustic chamber and pointing skyward. This leaves the remaining nine – three 19mm Titanium dome tweeters and six 2in glass fibre mid-rangers – to face front and side. The Atmos configuration is designated 3.1.2, with overall amplification rated at 400W.

Start me up

Setup requires you to jump through a few hoops, but is fairly straightforward. You'll need to download the Bowers & Wilkins Music app (available for iOS and Android, and originally launched to work with the brand's Formation wireless speakers), create an account and then discover and network-enable the 'bar itself.

There's no multiroom support out of the box, although a firmware update to resolve this is on the cards. We're told that in the future, the Panorama 3 will link with other Panoramas on your network (on the off chance you might own more than one), as well as stablemate Formation speakers. What the 'bar won't do is allow expansion of its own soundfield through an additional wireless subwoofer



2

or rear speakers. It's been designed as an 'integrated self-contained solution,' explains Andy Kerr, B&W's director of product marketing.

There's no remote control supplied, so basic Panorama 3 operation comes either via your TV remote or the on-body controls. There's also the option of looping the speaker to an Amazon Alexa ecosystem.

Just the one

While this one-box sound system has a higher-end ticket price, connectivity is disappointingly frugal. There's a single HDMI for eARC screen hookup, plus legacy digital optical audio should you need it, as well as (aptX Adaptive) Bluetooth and Wi-Fi/Ethernet.

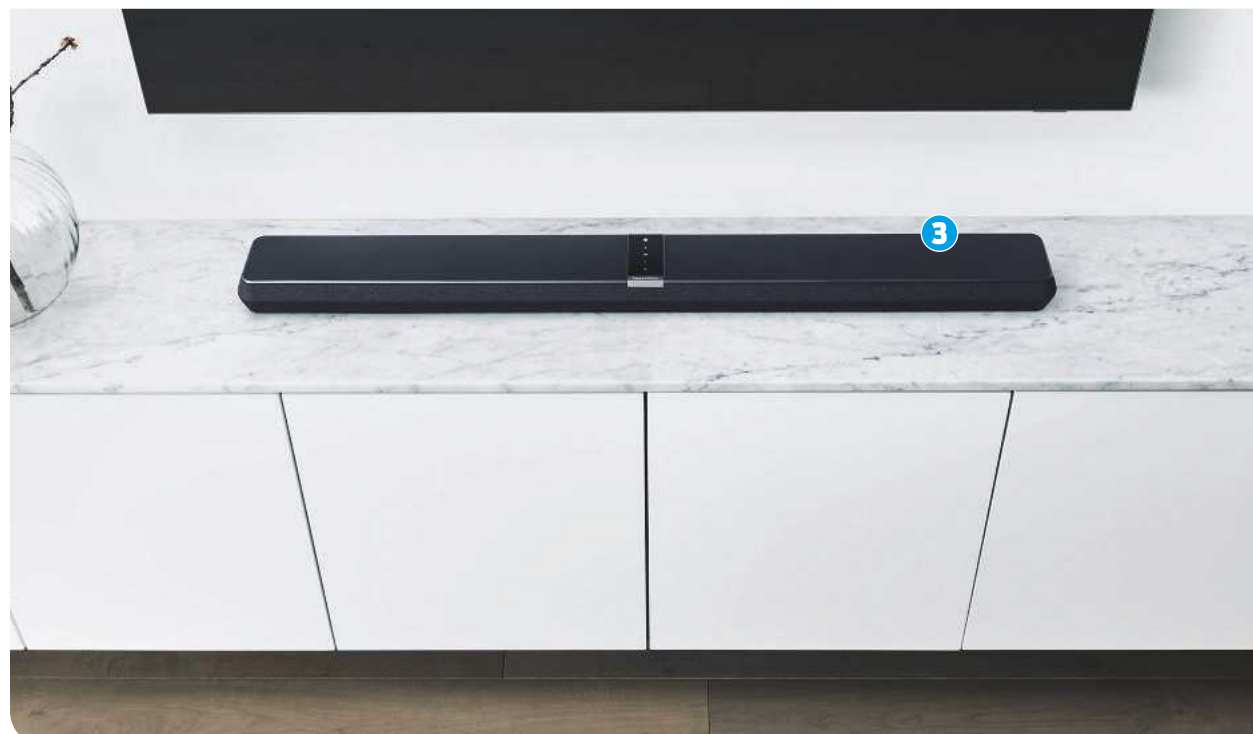
This means that AV sources, whether they're over-the-top streaming services, a gaming console, or broadcast TV/set-top box, can only be fed into the Panorama 3 via your connected flatscreen. It's not an AV hub in itself.

You can add music subscription services to B&W's Music app, however. There's support for Deezer, Last.fm, Qobuz, Soundcloud, Tidal and TuneIn, but note that although the app streams Tidal and Qobuz in hi-res 24-bit, you'll need the Tidal app on a Google Android TV, >

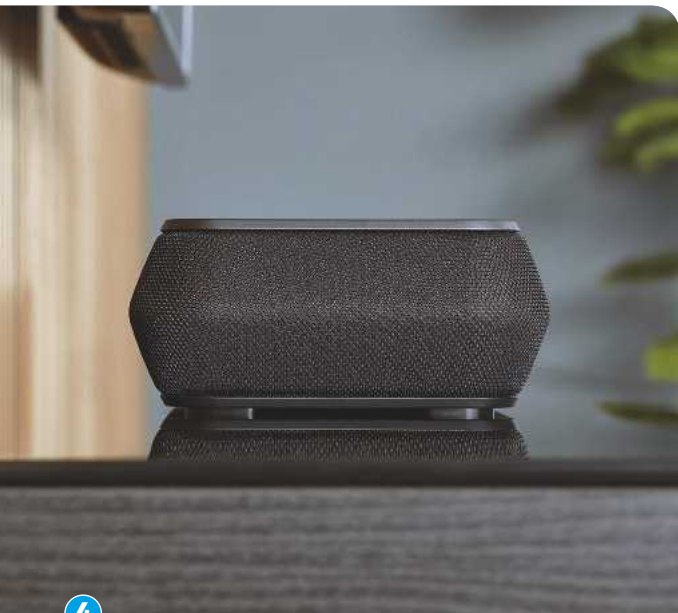
1. For this third-gen Panorama, B&W has dropped the cabinet curves in favour of gentle angles

2. Central to the perforated top-plate is a touchpanel with proximity sensor

3. The 'bar hides 13 drivers, including bass and Atmos pairs



3



SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 3 x 0.75in Titanium dome tweeters; 6 x 2in woven glass fibre cone bass/mid; 2 x 2in woven glass fibre cone Dolby Atmos upfiring; 2 x 4in 'low-profile' bass drivers **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 400W **CONNECTIONS:** 1 x HDMI eARC; 1 x optical digital audio input; Ethernet **DOLBY ATMOS/DTS:X:** Yes/No **SEPARATE SUBWOOFER:** No **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 1,210(w) x 65(h) x 140(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 6.5kg

FEATURES: 3.1.2 Dolby Atmos playback; Dolby Digital Plus; stereo/5.1 upmixing; wall-mountable; Apply AirPlay 2; Spotify Connect; Bluetooth v5.0; Amazon Alexa built-in; Bowers & Wilkins Music app (incl. Deezer, Qobuz, Tidal and TuneIn)

TESTED WITH



CHAOS WALKING: Now streaming on Netflix, Doug Liman's 2021 sci-fi offers a plethora of innovative sound design, and proof you don't need native Dolby Atmos content for a soundbar to strut its stuff. The film hinges on the clarity of its dialogue, but still manages to excite with its inventive multichannel 5.1 mix.

or connected Amazon Fire/Nvidia Shield/Apple TV media streamer, to deliver spatial audio.

Chaos theory

Bowers & Wilkins has a long and storied history of movie sound. Its premium speakers are routinely used in mastering suites at top-tier recording studios – including, famously, Abbey Road – although it has to be said the Panorama 3 is some way removed from the brand's 800 Series Diamond floorstanders (see p24). Somewhat

'B&W has done a brilliant job balancing the convenience of a one-box design with overall sound quality'

surprisingly, it doesn't even adopt the Tweeter on Top design employed for some of B&W's collaborations with Philips TVs.

Thankfully, it doesn't lack treble snap or articulation. The proto electronica of *The Robots*, by Kraftwerk, allows its glass fibre domes to shine, the track's distinctive robot voice effects sounding suitably crystalline. And despite the 'bar having a relatively modest footprint, it does big cinema audio remarkably well, and it's not totally dependent on Dolby Atmos content either.

The 5.1 soundtrack of *Chaos Walking* (Netflix), is given a seamless upmix. In the opening sequence, as our POV descends from orbit to New World terra firma, the soundstage blooms and opens as we swoop to meet Tom Holland for the first time. It's a wide and inviting performance.

Dialogue handling is good too. Clearly central to the movie's narrative in *Chaos Walking*, both spoken and imagined chatter is clear and well-rounded. Shut your eyes and it sounds like a *bona fide* centre channel speaker.

When misogynistic Mads Mikkelsen's horseback riders chase down Daisy Ridley, their hooves clump with believable weight, effectively cleaving through the score, pushing it wide left and right. I like how the bar sounds authoritative, and unapologetically cinematic.

Of course, to hear the soundbar at its spatial best, you'll want to feed it Dolby Atmos. The opening episode of Marvel's *Moon Knight* (Disney+) has an alpine chase sequence that's a full-on sonic thrill ride, with screeching tires and gunfire competing with Wham!'s *Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go*. Here the Panorama 3 is tight and exciting, neatly differentiating the pop track from the high-octane action – nothing gets lost in the mix.

There is a caveat, naturally. Without dedicated rear speakers, or any proactive DSP to create a surround illusion, the Panorama 3 doesn't fully envelop. In *Moon Knight*'s fourth episode, Steve Grant finds himself in a medical facility, where a bingo caller is calling numbers. The Atmos mix cleverly rolls the caller from rear left around the entire soundstage, emphasising Grant's disorientation. On the Panorama 3, though, these calls remain chained to the front.

Balancing act

The Panorama 3 is an impressive Dolby Atmos soundbar. The sheer size of the sonic canvas it paints is profound – it plays loud, and sounds formidable. Bowers & Wilkins' engineering team has done a brilliant job balancing the convenience of its one-box design with overall sound quality.

It's also enjoyably musical, and it's this that elevates it from a TV sound system to something rather more. I would have no qualms using it as a living room wireless speaker.

Operation could be improved. The lack of even a single HDMI input is a frustration, and while it's handy to use a TV wand to control volume, the reliance on the Music app to remotely switch sources is a pain point. After all, you'll not always be there when the system is being used, forcing everyone else to go manual with the touchpanel controls. Once they hear it in action, though, they'll love it ■

2. Although 1.2m wide, the 'bar chassis has a slender 6.5cm height

HCC VERDICT



Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 3

→ £900 → www.bowerswilkins.com

WE SAY: This slick Dolby Atmos 'bar may not be the easiest to live with, but it sounds terrific with movies and music, and the lack of a separate subwoofer is hardly missed at all.

HUMAX



IER AWARDS 2022
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Elevated gaming

The adoption of a 120Hz LCD panel and dedicated Game Bar have expanded the appeal of Philips' bright-room barnstormer, reports [Steve May](#)

TO ENTICE SHOPPERS as the 2022 hardware season gets into full swing, Philips has embellished its gilt-edge LED LCD mid-ranger – colloquially known as The One but officially designated the 55PUS8807 – with 120fps HFR support, VRR and a new dedicated Game Bar interface. Priced £899, it could be a gamer's dream, not to mention a well-appointed living room-friendly movie set.

This year the TV is available as a jaw-dropping 86in model for the first time, but if that's a little too imposing, smaller variants reach down to an accommodating 43in.

Now in its fourth generation, The One looks much like its predecessor (see *HCC* #329). The screen is framed by an ultra-slim bezel, and sits on a central pedestal stand, both elements a slick silver-grey. The remote control, with its dedicated buttons for Prime Video, Netflix, Rakuten.TV, and the Google app store, comes in a similar livery.

Approached side-on, Philips' TV is slim, but not dramatically so, given that it employs a direct rather than edge LED backlight. From this viewpoint you will also notice the PUS8807's three-sided Ambilight system, where LED lights run around the rear of the panel.

To appeal to gamers, the TV is AMD FreeSync Premium and Nvidia G-Sync certified, and features two HDMI inputs (out of four) that are 120fps capable. That means 4K HFR from games able to manage it (which in my case is almost exclusively *Call of Duty: Warzone*). Note you'll need to use the Monitor mode in order to enjoy full-res 4K/120.

The set also features Philips' new Game Bar interface, accessible via a long press of the remote's menu button. As we've seen on rival game-centric control systems, this dedicated UI reports frame rate, input lag level, HDR and colour space info.

Another new feature finds Philips jumping the ambient bandwagon, introducing a display option called Aurora. With this, when you're not watching a telly programme, you can put the screen into visual modes, including animated jellyfish, tumbling hearts, a gallery of assorted images, and even an assortment of clocks. It looks fun, but I personally can't imagine using it, mostly because it doesn't pop up like a screen saver – you have to manually select it.

The One's smart platform is Android 11, so that means a strong selection of OTT apps, plus Google Assistant

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
4K HDR TV
with Ambilight

POSITION:
High-spec LCD TV,
below Mini LED

PEERS:
Samsung
UE55BU8500;
Panasonic
TX-55JX940

support, while Freeview Play ensures the mainstream catch-up TV channels are covered.

Rey of light

For this model with home entertainment aspirations, Philips uses a high-contrast IPS 'Nano Color' panel. Ostensibly, IPS provides a wider viewing angle than VA-type LCD glass, better able to retain colour and brightness when viewed from the side, which often occurs in a typical living room environment. In reality, off-axis viewing still isn't particularly great, with the image bleaching when watched from the side-lines. Conversely, the IPS panel is able to make blacks look black, at least when viewed in a room with moderately high ambient light. Dim the lights, however, and the PUS8807 starts to reveal a grey bias.

Processing duties are handled by a 5th-gen P5 picture engine, which seems able to always find the fine detail in your sources, with excellent texture rendering and subtle gradations. When we first see Rey scavenging a downed Star Destroyer in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (4K BD), the PUS8807 delineates the complexity of the ship in the shadows without crushing too much near-black detail. Then, as Rey exits the ship, her torch is rendered pin-prick bright in the gloom. This 4K HDR performance is well suited to the blockbuster visuals, provided you switch the set's motion processing style to 'Movie'.

Back on the bright, sunlit-sands of Tatooine, the overall picture 'level'

is high but still has a dynamic punch. As Rey trades her scavenged parts with Unkar Plutt, you can't help but admire the prosthetics and digital post effects that transformed Simon Pegg.

The TV's confluence of colour and contrast is showcased spectacularly with *Chip 'n' Dale: Rescue Rangers* (Disney+). When Dale, newly redrawn in 3D, banter with Ugly Sonic, the sheer detail and vibrant hues on screen had me grinning in appreciation. The panel claims a wide colour gamut (of 90% of DCI-P3), and this equates to plenty of inviting primaries.

When Dale returns home, only to find Alvin of the Chipmunks lurking, spot-lighting HDR effects bring his diminutive den alive. In fact, overall HDR performance from this mid-ranger is reassuringly good. We measured peak brightness at 520 nits, using a standard 10 per cent white window, and this is enough to lift specular highlights – such as reflections, points of bright light and visual sparkles – as well as emphasise depth. Another plus point is the TV's universal HDR support. This includes HDR10+ Adaptive, an upgrade that allows the set to manage HDR picture parameters based on ambient light in the room.

Image presets are Personal, Vivid, Natural, Eco, Movie, and Expert 1 and 2, plus HDR specific variations: HDR Personal, Vivid, Bright, Dark and Game. Philips' Eco mode dulls the picture, leaving the more vibrant and dynamic Natural setting my preferred default. The Vivid setting is also rather moreish, with rich hues and startling (but not

SPECIFICATIONS

4K: Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. Dolby Vision; HDR10; HDR10+; HLG **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview Play; satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 2 x USB; digital optical audio output; Ethernet; 3.5mm audio out **4K/120 PLAYBACK:** Yes **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 2 x 10W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,231(w) x 718(h) x 80(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 15.5kg

FEATURES: Android 11 TV OS with Chromecast; Google Assistant; Works with Alexa; three-sided Ambilight; P5 Perfect Picture engine; DTS Play-Fi compatible; Dolby Atmos; Aurora ambient mode; Wi-Fi; Bluetooth 5.0; HDR10+ Adaptive; HDMI 2.1 with ALLM and VRR support; AMD FreeSync Premium; eARC; Filmmaker Mode

TESTED WITH



CHIP 'N' DALE: RESCUE RANGERS:

Blending live action with animation, this Disney+ reboot directed by Lonely Island member Akiva Schaffer is a visual feast for 'toon and genre fanatics. Streaming in 4K Dolby Vision, it peppers every scene with characters and references that stretch far beyond the classic House of Mouse stable.



over-emphasised) definition. Can't decide? Use Auto Movie, which triggers whenever film content is detected.

Latency is good – we measured 16.6ms input lag in Game mode with a 1080/60 feed. Yet I'm not so enamoured with the presentation of the HDR Game preset. In the Caldera Battle Royale map on *COD: Warzone*, I thought the rocky

roads, forest and outhouses appeared over-lit, flat even.

Audio quality is functional, with knobs on. The TV is Dolby Atmos aware, but still stereophonic (it will pass the bitstream out to an external soundbar or system, though). Nor is its onboard 2 x 20W sound system short of volume.

A potentially useful new feature lets you use the TV's speakers as the centre channel in a multi-speaker home cinema setup. This saves space, and allows you to increase dialogue volume independent from what's going on in other speakers. Not available during testing, the firmware update should drop in time for the TV's retail launch.

Happy to meet you

This new iteration of The One is a significant upgrade on its predecessor, thanks to new gaming-friendly talents and bonus features. HDR Game mode caveats aside, it could be the perfect partner for your console. I'd also happily recommended the set for everyday bright room use, thanks to its overall brightness and punchy dynamics. It looks fine with regular HD and great with higher-res sources ■

HCC VERDICT



Philips 55PUS8807

→ £899 → www.philips.co.uk

WE SAY: Newly upgraded, this 2022 version of The One is a brilliant value choice for gamers and telly-tainment fans – a top-notch living room set with a host of features.

1. The PUS8807 comes in sizes from 43in to 86in. We auditioned the 55in model

2. In addition to three-sided Ambilight, the TV debuts Philips' new Aurora ambient display mode

Sonus faber Omnia

This stylish 'wireless speaker with ambition' catches the eye of **Ed Selley**. But what about his ears?

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AV INFO

PRODUCT:

Premium wireless speaker with HDMI ARC

POSITION:

First such model from the Italian audio brand

PEERS:

Naim Mu-So 2nd Gen; JBL L75ms

WHEN IT COMES

to making beautiful audio products, Italian manufacturer Sonus faber has an impeccable track record. Therefore, its move into the wireless speaker category comes with some aesthetic expectations.

In other words, there was no way

the Omnia was going to be a bland, black box. Okay, you can get it in black (Graphite, as Sonus faber puts it) or walnut finish. Both are very classy, with the cabinet mixing curves and angles and fabric and wood elements.

Generous spec

With its size and price, the Omnia seems to be gunning for the likes of Naim's £1,450 Mu-so 2nd Generation one-box. So too does a generous specification that includes 24-bit/192kHz PCM and DSD support, Apple AirPlay 2, Chromecast, aptX HD Bluetooth and Tidal/Spotify Connect. There's also an HDMI ARC input for your TV (and this is your only

option, as there's no optical input), plus an analogue connection that can be used for either line in or MM phono, depending on what you need – although both require use of a slightly ungainly adapter.

Beneath the look-at-me exterior, the Omnia features drivers that are recognisably derived from Sonus faber's more conventional loudspeakers. Two 19mm soft dome tweeters handle treble, and crossover to a pair of 3in paper/cellulose mid-range units. Completing what would be a three-way approach is a single 6.5in aluminium woofer, mounted to fire downward through a hole in the base of the cabinet, yet there's then two 1.75in full-range drivers at either end of the Omnia, aiming to deliver the feeling of soundstage width that single-chassis speakers can struggle with. Claimed power for this 'four-way', from Class D amplifiers, is 490W.

The £1,599 asking price screams premium, but you'll feel you're getting your money's worth. One part of the Omnia's appeal is the touchpanel system built into the wooden top panel and denoted by LED strips. Done badly it could look terrible, but here it's gorgeous. This interface complements a decent remote control and, while I think the Omnia would benefit from a unifying control app, it would be a stretch to call it hard to use.

Crescendo, here we go!

The idea here is a speaker that can handle all you throw at it, both content from your TV as well as your music library. And if this is what you're after, the Omnia needs to go right to the top of your list.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 2 x 19mm soft dome tweeters; 2 x 3in paper/cellulose mid-range; 1 x 6.5in aluminium bass driver; 2 x 1.75in cellulose 'width' drivers **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 490W **CONNECTIONS:** HDMI ARC; Ethernet; analogue input (line/MM phono via supplied adapter) **DOLBY ATMOS/DTS:X:** No **SEPARATE SUB:** No **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 650(w) x 130(h) x 280(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 7.6kg

FEATURES: Wi-Fi; Ethernet; aptX HD Bluetooth; Apple AirPlay2; Chromecast; Tidal and Spotify Connect; Roon Ready; 'Crescendo' DSP engine; 'Senso' control panel; 30Hz-25kHz claimed freq. response

The Omnia hides seven drivers, including 6.5in bass

Those two drivers on the ends of the cabinet really seal the deal. Sonus faber calls this system, and the DSP used to manage it, 'Crescendo', and, so long as the Omnia is in relatively free space, it works a charm. There's a width and scale to the presentation that's uncanny, making the chase sequence through the forest in *The Adam Project* (Netflix) remarkably immersive. It's not quite 'side Atmos', but it effectively pushes the soundstage outward without detracting from the precise delivery of dialogue in the centre.

This latter element is consistently good too. The quiet and intense chatter of *Slow Horses* (Apple TV+) is easy to latch on to, yet relayed in a way that feels in balance with the rest of the soundmix. There is an unforced clarity to the way the Omnia sounds that reflects clever internal DSP work being carefully applied.

It's no less impressive when listening to music. Sonus faber's single-chassis diva offers a clean stereo sound with rich tonality, plenty of low-end extension and an impressive amount of dynamic attack. The glorious blues-tinged *Dropout Boogie* by The Black Keys is lush and lively. The speaker is perhaps a little less forgiving of compressed material than others, but it still sounds good with Spotify and similar sources.

In fact, the Omnia sounds good full stop. What Sonus faber has done here is find a way to bring the width and space of its traditional stereo speaker arrays to a one-box design, while continuing the company's longstanding tradition of mid-range warmth and energy, not to mention attractive aesthetics ■

HCC VERDICT

★★★★★

Sonus faber Omnia

→ £1,599 → www.sonusfaber.com

WE SAY: It's attractive, well made and easy to use, but most importantly Sonus faber's premium wireless speaker sounds fantastic.





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Can French marque Triangle bring affordable hi-fi to immersive cinema? **Steve Withers** investigates

Covering all the angles

The stated philosophy of Triangle is to add a dash of romanticism to the world of hi-fi by emphasising emotion and sensitivity rather than reason and rationalism... so no prizes for guessing this manufacturer hails from France. The question is: do its loudspeakers have that certain *je ne sais quoi*?

The Borea range aims to bring the brand's passion for musicality to the home cinema market, and do so at an affordable price. The speakers benefit from some trickle-down tech from Triangle's higher-end Esprit Ez range, while also embracing modern immersive audio systems by including a new surround speaker that doubles as an upward-firing effects module.

The lineup is topped by the BR09, a five-driver, three-way floorstander. This is followed by the BR08, a three-way tower with four drivers; and finally the BR07, a three-driver 2.5-way design. Triangle also offers a brace of bookshelf speakers (the BR03 and the smaller BR02), a centre channel (BRC1), and the aforementioned BRA1 Atmos/surround speaker.

The variety shown by this seven model series allows you to build a system based on your needs, space and budget. In this review, I'm testing a 5.0.2-channel system composed of BR08s and BRC1 centre speaker front-of-house, two BR03 bookshelves as surrounds, and a pair of BRA1s sitting on top of the floorstanders. There's no Borea subwoofer, but Triangle recommends its Tales 400 or Tales 300 as a good match. During testing, I used my two M&K V12 subs to create a 5.2.2-channel system.

With the big BR08 retailing for just £749 a pair, the centre at £249, and the BR03 and BRA1 both priced at £399 a pair, the result is an entire system for £1,796, hopefully leaving you with dosh for a decent woofer.

Scandi noir... or white, oak or walnut

The Borea styling is rather traditional, which is something of a surprise given the penchant shown by other French brands to go a bit mad when it comes to design (including Triangle with some of its pricier models). Instead, these take inspiration from Scandinavia – all clean lines and elegant minimalism. There are simple binding posts at the rear, and a choice of four attractive finishes: black, white, light oak or walnut, all with matching fabric grilles. The BR08 also comes with a pedestal for improved stability.

All the speakers use a 1in silk dome tweeter housed in what Triangle refers to as EFS (Efficient Flow System), which partially horn-loads the tweeter in a waveguide. The various models then employ a 5in or 6.25in midrange made of untreated cellulose, which was previously introduced in the Esprit Ez. The larger BR08 also includes a pair of fibreglass woofers for deeper bass. All the speakers, aside from the BRA1, use forward-firing ports to augment their low-end extension.

Since the BRA1 has been designed with an adjustable crossover, you'll find a switch at the back with a choice of (A) wall-mounted and firing down, or (B) mounted on top of another speaker and firing upwards. The angled shape ensures precise and direct targeting of the sound waves towards the listener when wall-mounted, or reflected off the ceiling when looking skywards.

Playing the part

The Borea system confidently blends the brand's musical ethos with the complex interactions of a multichannel system. There's an excellent energy to the overall delivery, combined with a precision when it comes to picking out individual voices, effects or instruments. The use of the same tweeters and drivers plays its part, leading to a sound that's both tonally balanced and pleasingly cohesive in terms of the soundstage.

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Entry-level floorstanding system with Atmos modules

POSITION: Affordable option in the Triangle range, sitting below the Esprit Ez

PEERS: Polk Reserve; Monitor Audio Bronze 6G; Elipson Prestige Facet

1. Triangle's BR08 features twin 6.25in woofers and a dedicated mid-range

2. The BRA1s have a selectable crossover for on-wall (surround) or upfiring (Atmos)



3



Kicking off with the Dolby Atmos soundtrack of *Hans Zimmer Live in Prague* (Blu-ray), this package didn't disappoint. The encore of *Time* starts with Zimmer playing piano, before slowly building with the addition of cello, violins, Johnny Marr's electric guitar, a brass section, and vocals. It's a complex and subtle arrangement, and it sounded fantastic through the Boreas.

The floorstanders anchor the entire soundstage, delivering crisp high frequencies and a textured midrange that defines each instrument. They also give the drums depth without needing to resort to the subs. The rest of the array joins in, tight and responsive and ensuring all channels coalesce into a seamless whole. The upfiring BRA1s add some nice ambience to this live recording.

The 4K Blu-ray of *Moonfall* provided a sterner test. It has the kind of Atmos soundtrack for which the word

'These are well-balanced, flexible when it comes to placement, and handle detail and scale with equal aplomb'

dynamic was invented – frenetic, full-range and all-channels go. Triangle's speakers stepped admirably up to the plate, moving the myriad effects around the room with smart fluidity.

The sequence where a space shuttle launches through a massive tidal wave sounded amazing through this system, with the roaring engines digging deep (although my M&K subs were obviously doing heavy lifting here). But what the Boreas delivered was a sense of size, especially as the advancing water towers over the launch gantry. The splashing of gravity-defying liquid was rendered all around, and the BRA1s played their part in immersing me in the nonsense on screen.

I was pleased to discover these speakers can deliver the grand scale required of today's blockbusters, but what

SPECIFICATIONS

Borea BR08

DRIVERS: 1 x 1in EFS silk dome tweeter; 1 x 6.25in midrange; 2 x 6.25in fibreglass woofers **ENCLOSURE:** Forward-ported bass reflex **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 40Hz-22kHz (+/-3dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 92dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 8ohm (nominal); 3ohm (minimum) **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 150W **DIMENSIONS (INCL. PEDESTAL):** 260(w) x 1,051(h) x 360(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 18.9kg

Borea BRC1

DRIVERS: 1 x 1in EFS tweeter; 2 x 5in bass/mid **ENCLOSURE:** Forward-ported bass reflex **FREQ. RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 57Hz-22kHz (+/-3dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 90dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 8ohm (nominal); 5.3ohm (min) **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 100W **DIMENSIONS:** 484(w) x 252(h) x 274(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 7.5kg

Borea BR03

DRIVERS: 1 x 1in EFS tweeter; 1 x 6.25in bass/mid **ENCLOSURE:** Forward-ported bass reflex **FREQ. RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 46Hz-22kHz (+/-3dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 90dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 8ohm (nominal); 4.2ohm (min) **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 100W **DIMENSIONS:** 206(w) x 380(h) x 314(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 6.0kg

Borea BRA1

DRIVERS: 1 x 1in EFS tweeter; 1 x 6.25in bass/mid **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQ. RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 90Hz-22kHz (+/-3dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 89dB **IMPEDANCE (CLAIMED):** 8ohm (nominal); 4.5ohm (min) **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 80W **DIMENSIONS:** 206(w) x 180(h) x 300(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 3.6kg

TESTED WITH



MOONFALL: Master of disaster Roland Emmerich directs another hugely entertaining slice of sci-fi hokum, and the film lands on UHD BD with a stunning native 4K HDR10/Dolby Vision picture and a dynamic Dolby Atmos soundtrack so bass-heavy you'll think the moon's about to crash through the ceiling.

of fine detail and dynamics? *A Quiet Place Part II* (4K Blu-ray) has an audio mix full of subtle cues that the speakers delivered sweetly, and dialogue was handled with a nuanced clarity, proving the BRC1 to be a capable centre speaker at a bargain price. The moment where one of our heroes is startled by a monster in a train carriage, meanwhile, arrived with gusto, revealing a punchy and agile overall performance. These speakers also seem easy to drive, so partner them with a decent receiver, and you'll be rewarded with a system that's fast, dynamic and composed.

Bang for your buck

If you're looking for a speaker system that's attractive and well-made, effectively delivers object-based audio, and isn't going to break the bank, then the Borea range is right up your Champs-Élysées. These sound well-balanced, are flexible when it comes to placement, and handle detail and scale with equal aplomb. Triangle may not be a brand you're immediately familiar with, but on this evidence it's only a matter of time before it's a household name ■

3. All Borea speakers (except the Atmos units) feature bass reflex cabinets with front-facing ports

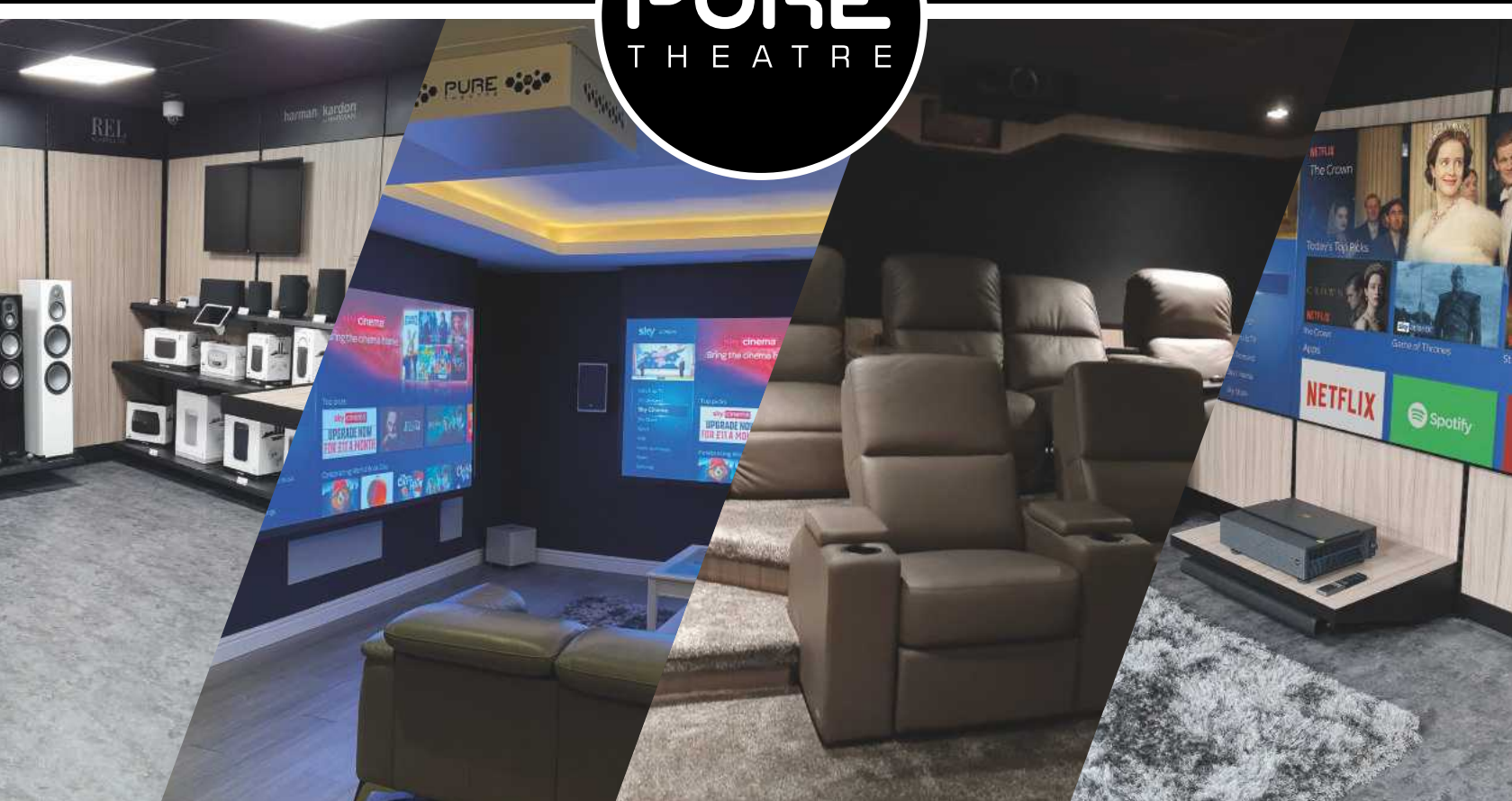
HCC VERDICT

★★★★★

Triangle Borea 5.0.2

→ £1,799 → www.trianglehifi.com

WE SAY: These capable and affordable speakers are easy to look at, easy to drive and easy to place. The performance is musical, dynamic and cohesive, and you won't find better at this price.



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Up against the wall

LG's new UST laser projector is smart, compact and bright. **Steve May**, who is none of those things, takes a closer look

IF YOU INVITE the neighbours to watch *Turning Red* on your new LG 'CineBeam' HU715Q projector, will they leave an envious shade of green? I reckon so. The Korean company's take on the (slowly) evolving 'laser TV' market is delightfully impressive.

Clearly hoping to muscle out sector rivals including Optoma and BenQ, the model combines the unquestionable convenience of all-in-one Ultra Short Throw (UST) beaming with the TV smarts of its WebOS platform, plus minimalist design sensibility.

The key appeal of any UST projector is that it can deliver a huge image into virtually any space, with no impact on physical infrastructure or line of sight. Living rooms, dens, lofts and even bedrooms can benefit.

Wherever it ends up, the HU715Q will probably be used with a white wall, but for those with the space and inclination, an ALR (Ambient Light Rejection) screen would be the icing on the cake. However, LG isn't following the Hisense route in bundling the projector with a screen (see the Hisense 100L9GTUK, HCC #331), so buyers will need to shop around.

Using a wall, setup will only take a few minutes, with just a bit of shuffling required to size the image – you'll get a 100in picture from a distance of 22cm. There's keystone correction with progressive 4-, 9- and 15-point adjustment to combat distortion, and it's at this point most users will probably realise that their chosen surface isn't ruler flat.

Usability is generally great. LG's laser light engine starts up really fast (compared to regular lamp models), with the projector reaching full brightness almost instantly.

When it comes to design, LG steers clear of flashiness. The unit, which measures just over 50cm wide and 30cm deep, has a white matte finish to blend with pretty much any decor. Even the handset, one of LG's 'Magic Remote' jobs, is finished in matching white and backlit for home theatre duties. The forward-facing stereo speaker array, meanwhile, is clad in tasteful grey Kvadrat fabric.

Rear connectivity is generous. There are three HDMI's, one of which is 2.1 eARC/ARC and supports Auto Low Latency Mode for gamers. There are also two USB ports, one optical digital audio output, and an Ethernet LAN to complement Wi-Fi and AirPlay 2.

Dynamic snap

While it's not a native 4K model, instead using TI's micro mirror flipping technique to deliver pixel-dense images, the HU715Q looks convincingly UHD. It's also reassuringly

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Ultra Short Throw
4K laser projector

POSITION:
LG's top-of-the-
range UST beamer

PEERS:
Optoma CinemaX P2;
BenQ V7000i;
Hisense 100L9GTUK

bright – LG quotes a 2,500 Lumens output for its laser source (plus a worry-free lifespan of 20,000 hours), and it's certainly potent enough for daylight viewing. Even in a sunlit room, the picture has appreciable dynamic snap with excellent colour fidelity. Playing a role here is LG's Brightness Optimiser, which can make automatic adjustments according to ambient light conditions.

Indeed, the PJ looks its best with bright imagery, and animation in particular, making time with Disney+ well spent. *Turning Red* is this CineBeam's happy place. The vivid primaries of Pixar's 'toon hit are nothing less than stunning, particularly in a dark lighting-controlled room.

Meilin's first flight home as the giant red panda is a vibrant cavalcade of colour, with a gorgeous depiction of cherry blossom and pottery tiles, and the rich hues and textures of the creature itself. Colour gradations are smooth, with no overt banding.

Dynamic Tone Mapping, which analyses every frame in real time, is available to optimise HDR10 performance (the projector has no truck with the dynamic HDR10+ and Dolby Vision formats). Of course, HDR as managed by a projector like the HU715Q isn't comparable to the experience of a flatscreen TV, but this LG does a decent job of lifting specular highlights.

Into the archives

The real challenge is just how well this projector handles near-black detail, and, inevitably, there's a limit to how profound its black level is. The shadowy work environments of videotape archivist Dan Turner in supernatural drama *Archive 81* (Netflix) are depicted with more mysterious gloom than the director probably intended, and the show's night-time New York City street scenes are distinctly smudgy; still, close-up fine detail, as Turner meticulously restores his demonic Video8 tapes, is convincing.

The projector's image preset selection mirrors what you'd find on an LG TV: Standard, Cinema (and Cinema Home with HDR content), Sports and Vivid, plus Filmmaker Mode, Expert Bright Space, Expert Dark Space (for day or night), and Game Optimizer. I don't feel the various cinematic modes really show the HU715Q at its best. The Filmmaker Mode, and even Cinema Home, undersell the potential of its laser light engine; the image

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes, 3,840 x 2,160 via Texas Instruments fast-switching DMD **HDR:** Yes, HDR10; HLG **CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI inputs; optical digital audio output; 2 x USB **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 2,500 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** 2,000,000:1 **ZOOM:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 533(w) x 153(h) x 315(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 11.1kg

FEATURES: Laser light engine; DLP projection technology; 2 x 20W built-in audio; HGiG support; 20,000 hours claimed lamp life; 26dB-30dB (Eco/Bright) claimed fan noise; 0.22:1 throw ratio; TruMotion processing; LG ThinQ voice recognition; Apple AirPlay 2; WebOS 6.0 smart system; Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; Dynamic HDR Tone Mapping; MiraCast; keystone correction; Brightness Optimizer with Ambient Sensor; colour management system

TESTED WITH



TURNING RED: A visually stunning CG animation with oodles of detail and a high-impact colour palette, this coming of age allegory from Bao director Domee Shi leans heavily into anime style, making it stylistically different from other Pixar movies. A real treat for your eyes, either via Disney+ or disc (see p89).



is just a little flat and stripped of colour volume. Standard is the more obvious crowd-pleaser.

Another familiar LG technology – TruMotion – is present here, and its options are extensive and effective. The Smooth setting works well with fast-moving sports, and even the Cinematic Movement option isn't objectionable when watching movies. Give it a try.

As for the smart platform, this 6.0 iteration of WebOS offers a strong selection of apps, including Netflix, Prime Video, Disney+,

YouTube, Sky Store, Rakuten.TV and Apple TV, plus a Home Dashboard for connected smart devices and LG's ThinQ voice recognition. There's no Freeview tuner, but it's all very slick, and a cut above most rivals.

The same can't be said for the HU715Q's audio. This isn't as punchy as its pictures, with a somewhat boxy and confined feeling to the soundstage. Still, there's copious volume, and enough mid-range weight to prevent everything sounding thin. You could couple the projector with a soundbar or external system, although that would seem a bit odd, given the form factor.

Hitting the heights

Minor niggles aside, LG's latest UST model is a compelling proposition. It's an outstanding bright room performer, and while I have some reservations about black level proficiency, colour vibrancy and fine detail score high. Well suited for sports and movie use, and with slick smarts too, the HU715Q is easily recommended ■

HCC VERDICT



LG HU715Q

→ £2,999 → www.lg.com/uk

WE SAY: Easy operation, sensible styling and WebOS smarts make LG's latest CineBeam UST projector a joy to use. Images can also be jaw-dropping, day or night.

1. A front-facing Kvadrat grille hides the projector's 2 x 20W-rated speaker system

2. LG's ultra-short-throw (0.22:1) lens fires out of the top-panel vent

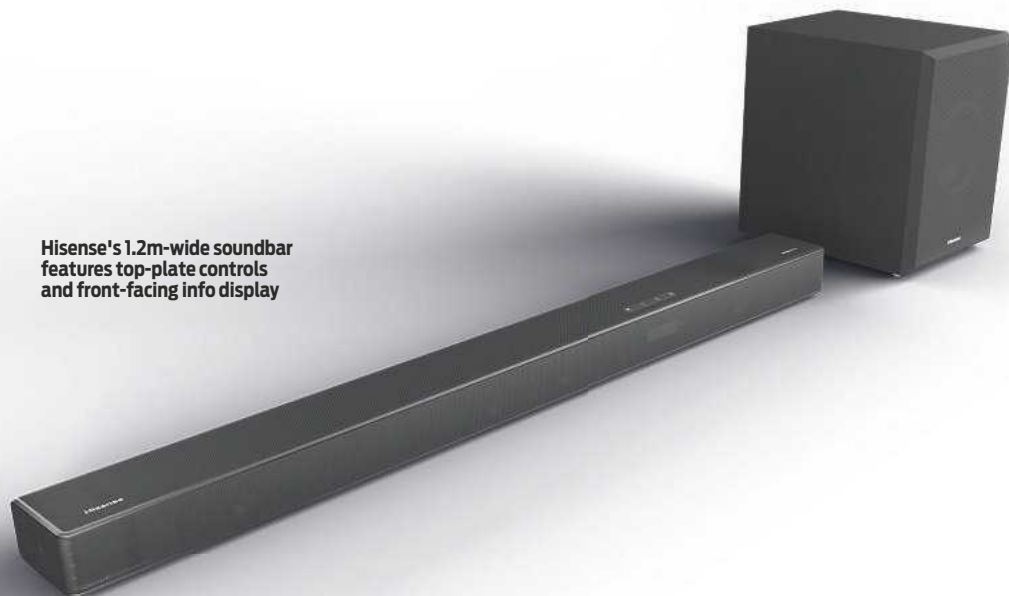
3. Three HDMI (one eARC enabled) are joined by Ethernet, optical and USB (x2) connections



Hisense U5120GW

Mark Craven enjoys the connection flexibility – and Atmos presentation – of this two-piece sound system

Hisense's 1.2m-wide soundbar features top-plate controls and front-facing info display



WITH THE U5120GW, Hisense is upping its soundbar game. Previously, the Chinese company's soundbars (the ones sold in the UK, at least) have been budget affairs – just £130 would get you its most expensive 2021 model. This new arrival sells for £499.

A few things explain this. Firstly, it's a Dolby Atmos soundbar with physical upfiring drivers rather than the more affordable (and usually less impressive) virtual alternative. There's even decoding of DTS:X soundtracks.

Secondly, it's big at around 1.2m wide, suited to TVs 55in and up. The accompanying wireless subwoofer is also moderately large.

And then there's the rest of the spec, which includes seven sound presets, and a connections bank that is comprehensive for

this day and age, even including both coaxial and optical digital ins.

These are likely to be left unused by many, so it's perhaps a bit of overkill from Hisense, but the fact the U5120GW also features two HDMI inputs, to go with its third HDMI (eARC) connection, is superb. This means external

hardware (the TV) isn't going to add another layer of confusion to the process of getting sound. During my audition, being able to run a 4K deck and Sky Q box direct into the 'bar was useful, not least because I could always know exactly what audio format I was feeding it.

As the name alludes, this soundbar claims a 5.1.2 channel count. Visible through the grilles are dual-driver arrays for left, centre and right, single units aimed sideways, and the aforementioned upfiring pair.

A large text display shines through the front. This can show volume level, input and what sound preset you're using, and be completely dimmed if you wish via Hisense's supplied remote. This slim zapper also lets you flit between the Music, Movie, News, Sport, Night, Game and AI EQ settings, and adjust bass and treble levels. Of these, I never felt any need to tweak the latter, but bass management was occasionally useful.

Lake eerie

Sky's murder mystery *The Rising* has some impressively creepy Dolby Atmos design, and it revealed that the U5120GW can at least get something out of it. In the first episode, shortly after our dead heroine emerges from the lake, she treks through an eerie forest. The audio team have a field day here, peppering the soundstage with far-off tweeted bird song,

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 2 x Dolby Atmos upfiring; 2 x side-firing; 3 x two-way arrays for L/C/R
ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED): 510W (incl. sub)
CONNECTIONS: 2 x HDMI inputs; 1 x HDMI output (eARC/ARC); optical digital audio input; coaxial digital input; USB (service only)
DOLBY ATMOS/DTS:X: Yes/Yes
SEPARATE SUB: Yes, 8in
REMOTE CONTROL: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 1,200(w) x 73(d) x 113(d) mm
WEIGHT: 5kg

FEATURES: Bluetooth 4.2; Movie/Music/News/Night/Sport/Game/AI EQ sound modes; bass/treble adjust; surround bypass mode; wall-mount brackets supplied

some ghostly creaking sounds, and a flock of cawing crows. It's not possible to really pinpoint the positions of these elements in the mix, as you'd hope from a full Atmos system, but there's height and expansion here, and a sense that what you're hearing isn't coming from the slim box in front of you.

The music that swells during the credits appeared to find the edge of the bar's limits at the relatively high level I was listening, a touch of harshness creeping in. Yet, later on, the discovery of Neve's body is accompanied by insistent synths, and the way these mid-range elements and the sub dovetailed together to form a rich whole was more than pleasant.

Dialogue is helped by the dedicated centre array, although there's no option of rasing its level independently. The News preset, however, is a quite effective cure for when you might find dialogue quiet, while actually keeping the rest of the soundmix listenable.

Hisense's subwoofer puts in a game performance but is the least impressive part of the package, something of a flip on the soundbar system norm. During the bus fight scene in *Nobody* (Sky Cinema) it works great, punches and kicks landing with a deliciously painful-sounding short thud. But higher up the bass range, particularly when it's required to bounce away rhythmically to music, it begins to sound a bit flabby. It also pays dividends to keep it at the front of your room, as it can sound quite directional.

Counting against the U5120GW is its lack of any wireless skills beyond Bluetooth – multiroom and voice control don't get a look in. Counting in its favour is the size of its soundstage, the tangible impact those height drivers bring, and its flexible HDMI connection. Overall, this is a welcome addition to the Hisense portfolio ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 5.1.2-channel Atmos soundbar system with HDMI switching

POSITION: Hisense's premium soundbar

PEERS: JBL Bar 5.1 Surround; Samsung HW-Q600A

HCC VERDICT



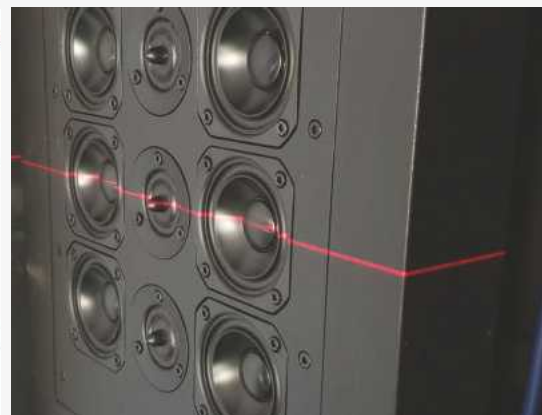
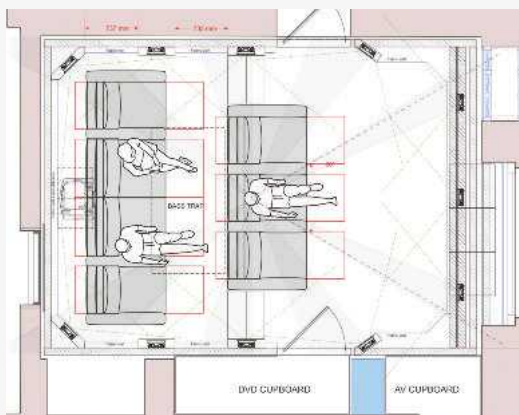
Hisense U5120GW

→ £499 → www.hisense.co.uk

WE SAY: Some might expect more feature bells and whistles at this price, but the expansive sound of this Hisense 'bar is commendable.

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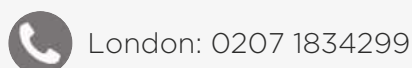
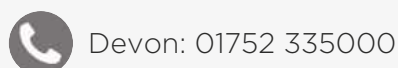
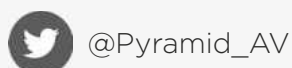
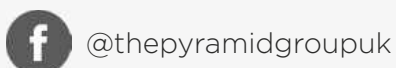
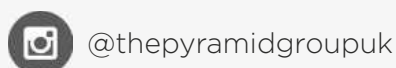
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BenQ beamer says it's hip to be square

While dressed to impress in your living room, BenQ's X3000i isn't a case of style over substance, says **Mark Craven**. There's plenty here to appeal to film and TV addicts

CAST AN EYE over BenQ's projector lineup and you get a sense of how much the product category has developed in the last few years. The manufacturer still sells what we think of as traditional beamers – lamp-based models intended for dark-room movie playback, now in both Full HD and 4K flavours – but has expanded into the ultra-short-throw market (with its V series), portable projection (the GV range), and numerous 'smart' models. The X3000i, auditioned here, heads down another avenue.

With its cuboid chassis and red bling ring around the front fascia, no one could confuse this for a dedicated home cinema projector. It's obviously destined for the coffee table in front of you, rather than the ceiling behind. BenQ denotes it as a gaming projector, as it does a host of other models that variously offer the promise of a high brightness, low input lag, gaming-friendly presets, or all three. Yet it transpires that the X3000i is no mug when it comes to spinning a movie either.

Colour space saviour

As it sells for a not inconsiderable £1,799, this DLP-based light cannon has to offer more than just a cute design, and it does. There's plenty about the specification that's reassuring, including BenQ's CinematicColor technology, a catch-all term for refinements the company has made to

its colour wheel and optical path, that result in a claimed 100 per cent coverage of the DCI-P3 colour space, and a certificate of factory calibration for every unit.

Then there's the fact it's the first consumer projector to make use of Texas Instruments' latest 0.65in DMD (Digital Mirror Device), which has been upgraded with larger micromirrors and is fast-switched four times per frame to deliver a 4K image from its native 1,920 x 1,080 pixel resolution.

The light source, too, is clearly above budget-spec. Instead of a normal lamp, the X3000i uses LEDs – four of them to be exact, with a newly devised secondary blue LED joining the RGB trio (the purpose of this, ironically, is to boost the projector's green/cyan output, the main area where DCI-P3 expands on REC.709). The lifetime of this source is rated at the now customary 20,000 hours, although the suggestion is it will last for 30,000 hours if the PJ is used in its Eco mode. BenQ also says the projector is smart enough to sense when the colour output of its LEDs has 'drifted' over time and auto-correct.

Go faster stripes

Other specification hits include 4K HDR10 playback; a trio of HDMI inputs (one tucked behind a door that's for use with the supplied QS01 Android smart dongle);

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
4K HDR DLP
projector with LED
light source

POSITION:
The priciest of
BenQ's 'gaming'
PJ range

PEERS:
XGIMI Horizon Pro;
ViewSonic X10-4K

eARC allowing passthrough of Dolby Atmos bitstreams; 3D playback (glasses not included); and 12V trigger and RS-232 connections for system integration. Gaming credentials, meanwhile, are burnished by a Fast mode claiming a 16ms input lag with 4K/60 material (and as low as 4ms with 1080p at 240Hz) – this kicks in automatically if you select one of the X3000i's trio of game genre specific presets. There's also Black Details Enhancement, for seeing into those pesky shadows in first-person shooters.

Lastly, the projector scores brownie points for offering a 1.3x optical zoom, which helps deliver a throw ratio of 1.15-1.5:1 that's probably well suited to most living room environments. Image alignment doesn't benefit from any lens shift, though, so you'll have to make do with keystone correction if you can't site the X3000i exactly where it needs to be.

Well-judged

What's particularly impressive about this projector is that the 'good for gamers' ethos hasn't caused BenQ to drop the ball anywhere else. As with the company's more conventional W1800 model (HCC #331), it offers a well-judged presentation of HDR, and a colour performance that really does seem to back up BenQ's 'cinematic' pledge. Images are sharp, stable and – when called for – bright and vivid. Black level depth is something of an achilles heel, meaning a loss of shadow details in particular, but countering this is the vivacity of the projector's imagery overall.

Watching *Fast & Furious 9* (4K Blu-ray), the X3000i delivers plenty of eye-opening detail and texture. Exterior shots of the Toretto farm, with its weathered wood outhouse, look sharp and natural. Later on, as the camera gazes at Charlize Theron in her weird cyber prison, you feel you're seeing each strand of her (also weird) bobbed haircut.

Contributing to the naturalistic imagery of the X3000i is impressive colour handling. This is an aspect of performance I've come to expect from BenQ, colour also being a standout trait of its V7000i UST model (HCC #324). With the wide colour grade of *Fast and Furious 9* (note you have to manually select WCG within the PJ's picture settings menu), you get lush greens during the minefield chase in 'Montequinto', while the various decals of the track cars during the opening flashback scene have decent pop. Yet it all feels realistic, with nothing seemingly overemphasised, and a solid grip on skin tone subtlety.

Image adjustments are fairly comprehensive, although slightly stripped back compared to BenQ's film-centric models. There are brightness, contrast and sharpness tools, plus gamma, colour temp, colour management, noise reduction and a five-step HDR Brightness selector. Of course, many owners won't want to spend time with these, preferring the dedicated picture presets.

These include HDR10 and HDR Game flavours, plus Bright, Living Room, Sports, Game and Cinema for standard dynamic range material. In a darkened room, Cinema was

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active shutter **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 via TI DLP 'double flashing' technology **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG **CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI inputs; 1 x USB; 3.5mm audio output; optical digital audio output; RS-232 port; 12V trigger **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 3,000 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** 500,000:1 **Zoom:** 1.3x **DIMENSIONS (WITHOUT FEET):** 272(w) x 197(h) x 259(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 6.4kg

FEATURES: 4LED light source; BenQ CinematicColor technology; 'HDR PRO' tone mapping; Fast mode for low input lag (16ms claimed with 4K/60); Black Details Enhancement; 2 x 5W TreVolo speaker system with Dynamic Stereo Enhancement; 30,000-hour claimed 'lamp' life (Eco mode); 1.15-1.5:1 throw ratio; 2D keystone correction; FPS, RPG and SPG game presets

TESTED WITH



FAST & FURIOUS 9: AKA the one when Dom Toretto's gang actually go into space, and the one where that guy who was dead turns out to be alive. Plot lunacy aside, this movie is an absolute blast, something that's helped by its highly energetic Dolby Atmos soundmix and bright, sharp HDR visuals on its 4K BD.



my clear favourite.

The X3000i put in an accomplished performance, adroitly balancing colour, contrast and detail with the cinematography of Sky Atlantic drama *Mare of Easttown*. Both Bright and Living Room are more aggressive in terms of colour and sharpness, giving the Kate Winslet series a more processed look, but the former of these in particular is a great option for viewing in daylight conditions.

There's no Filmmaker Mode here, nor BenQ's Motion Enhancer smoothing technology. I don't consider this a dealbreaker, as my experience with the V7000i was I preferred it switched off. Fast-moving action subsequently loses some detail, but looks decent all the same.

Letting the side down is the projector's onboard audio system. Comprising a pair of 5W-rated 'chamber' speakers, its performance seems hamstrung by the PJ's form factor – it's hard to shake the sense that sound is being beamed from the box in front of you. It also sounds a bit tonally unbalanced, and while BenQ's Dynamic Stereo Enhancement option does expand the soundfield, you'll never arrive at something that sounds better than your TV's speakers, let alone a soundbar or external system.

Accept its limitations, though, and the X3000i's sound is okay for general day-to-day use. Its picture performance, on the other hand, is much more than just okay. It's pretty darn great ■

1. Controls, including focus wheel, are located on the X3000i's side

2. Rear panel connections include two HDMI's and an optical audio out

HCC VERDICT



BenQ X3000i

→ £1,799 → www.benq.eu

WE SAY: Putting Texas Instruments' latest DLP chip to good use, the X3000i offers a more mature picture performance than you might expect given the styling.

Philips PicoPix Max TV

This portable HDR-capable PJ does its best work in the dark, discovers **Mark Craven**

THERE ARE PROJECTORS small and light enough to be easily moved around the house, and then there are *bona fide* portable models like Philips' PicoPix Max TV. This compact (16cm wide) Full HD beamer packs an internal rechargeable battery, and weighs a fairly modest 2kg approx. The idea is that you can use it wherever you want in the house, and then take it with you when you pop off on holiday.

There are caveats, though. The four-hour battery life is good for a movie, but not a TV series binge, and the claim of 120in image size should be taken with a pinch of salt, as the demands this puts on the Max TV's LED light source means images are only really watchable at this size if you're viewing in total darkness. You'll want to lower your bigscreen expectations.

Still, this Philips is almost comically over-specified for something that should be seen as providing casual home entertainment.



Its Full HD output is supported by HDR10 playback, and there are various preset image modes and some picture adjustment tools to finesse performance.

It's also smart, via the Android TV OS, meaning Netflix, YouTube, Disney+ and Prime Video are all an option. There's also voice

A manual cover keeps the lens safe

interaction through Google Assistant, accessible on the Max TV's clutter-free remote control.

Connections, in addition to Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, are HDMI, USB, and optical and 3.5mm audio outputs. But you're probably more likely to use the projector's in-built (and rather decent) speakers.

Pictures are eminently watchable in the right (light-controlled) environment, although you can get a better performance from non-portable Full HD projectors that sell for less. The Max TV's appeal therefore really boils down to whether you must have a PJ that can survive away from a socket for a few hours ■

HCC VERDICT



Philips PicoPix Max TV

→ £799 → www.philips.co.uk

CONSUMER.HUAWEI.COM/£129

Huawei Sound Joy

Steve May takes his tunes out and about with this wireless waterproof speaker

THE SOUND JOY is the latest audio collaboration between Huawei and high-end hi-fi outfit Devialet. And unlike their past offerings, the mains-tethered Sound (HCC #321) and Sound X (HCC #315), this is very much designed for a life outdoors.

Firstly, it's IP67 rated, meaning fine around dust and water. It also claims an impressive 26-hour battery life. Replenishment is via a USB-C socket, and the Sound Joy supports 40W super-fast charging, meaning

ten minutes on the wall will get you an hour of playtime.

Light show

Wrapped in fabric mesh, this 20cm-long cylindrical portable is bookended by two Devialet-branded passive radiators, and has a flashing LED light ring to get the party started.

On-body controls handle power, Bluetooth connection (v5.2) and volume, the latter via two huge buttons on the case. The overall design is quite smart, but not unique – put this next to a JBL Charge 5 and you might struggle to spot the difference.

Two Sound Joys can form a stereo pair. If you shake them in close proximity to one another, they'll link up – although I didn't get a chance to test this.

There's no hardwire aux input for a local device hookup, which might annoy some. As

will the fact that the speaker's LED light show feature is actually off by default, and has to be activated from Huawei's AI Life app.

For an affordable, battery-driven wireless speaker, you can't help but be impressed by the Sound Joy. It drops low, but has a sweet edge, and can handle both gentle acoustics and heavy beats. A carbon-fibre bass/mid driver is rated down to 50Hz, while a silk-dome tweeter sings out treble. The dual 'push-push' passive radiator arrangement is used to reinforce its low-frequency reach.

Vocal articulation is good, and it's a fun listen with pop and dance, but if it does have a limitation it's a lack of agility. The speaker's form factor and portable nature help make up for this, though ■



There are red and green finishes available too

HCC VERDICT



Huawei Sound Joy

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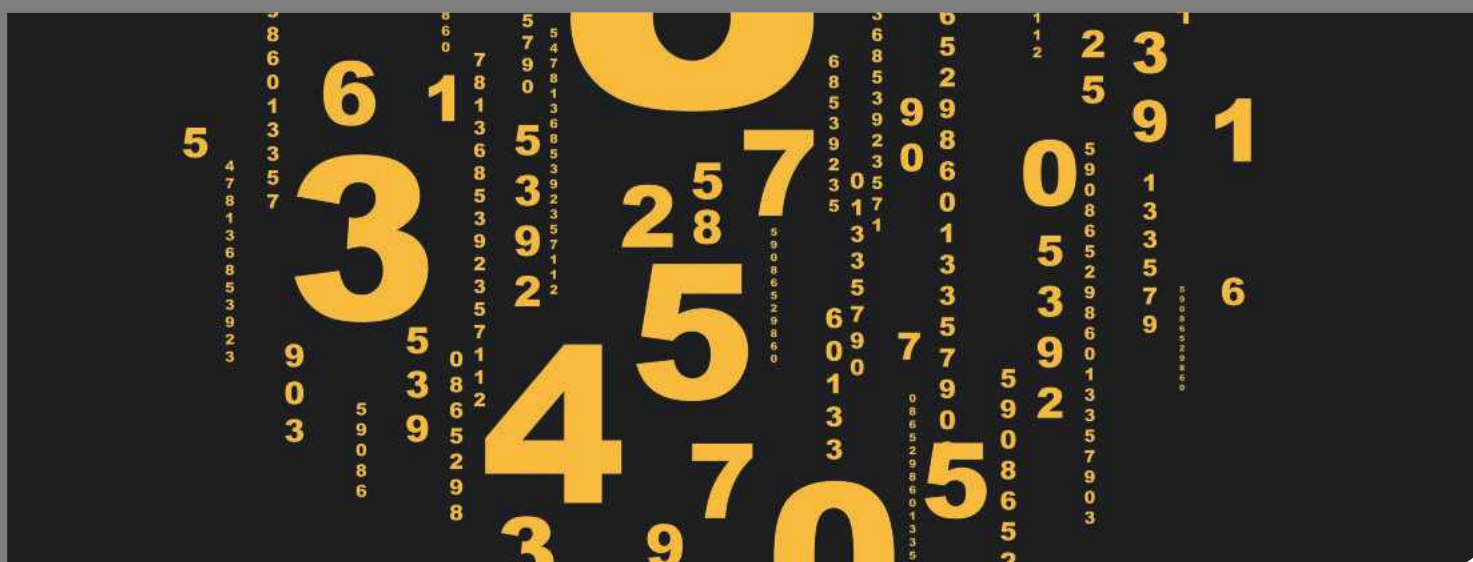
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Digital Copy

Product specifications should help you make an informed purchase. But sometimes, says **Mark Craven**, all those numbers add up to nothing but marketing sleight of hand

CONSUMER ELECTRONICS HAS long been playing the numbers game. Product spec sheets are littered with them, and it's up to the prospective buyer to read the runes and work out what's what. Some numbers you want small, like input lag or distortion. Others you want large, such as contrast ratio or HDR brightness. And then there's power.

I'm not talking here about power *consumption*. This is a whole other kettle of fish and one that we're all now taking a keener interest in, as energy bills rise faster than the helium balloon you just bought your child at the fair and forgot to tie down (sorry, painful memory). Instead, my concern is amplifier power, and what it means.

The subject came up during a conversation with Achim Schulz, a senior product manager at Sound United, the home of brands including Denon, Marantz, Classe and Bowers & Wilkins. A Belgian tech journalist friend of mine asked Schulz an interesting question: 'Why doesn't Denon give a power rating for its soundbars?'

The answer was honest and thought-provoking. Power ratings for soundbars, said Schulz, 'bring very little benefit to the customer.'

And he has a point. Knowing the 'power' of your soundbar's (or TV's) onboard amplifiers doesn't tell you very much at all, because **amplifier power is only one part of the equation**. The problem is that some potential buyers probably think it does.

In our reviews in *HCC* we list the claimed amplifier power of a product. Perhaps, in some cases, we shouldn't, although we at least hope that there's an obvious grey area when a soundbar system costing a few hundred quid might claim to have the same available grunt as a monoblock power amplifier costing thousands.

For those numbers to have real benefit, you'd want to know the rated sensitivity of the speakers they're being used to drive, as well as the load (impedance) that the amplifier is 'seeing'. It would also be handy to know the bandwidth and distortion levels. Serious geeks might even want to know the amplifier class, and the manufacturer of the devices.

At the end of the day, it doesn't matter how loud a soundbar can go if the noise it produces is like a bunch of cats meowing inside a biscuit tin.

Bigger the better?

The reason why soundbar and TV manufacturers still provide these figures is obvious – they're a handy marketing tool. 100W is better than 50W, and 200W is better yet. Rated outputs on AV receivers and amplifiers are far more useful, as they usually come with numbers signifying variance into different loads, measured at different frequencies, etc. But that doesn't mean these aren't also given a marketing spin. Simaudio's Moon 888 mono amplifier – a beast that truly does sound phenomenal – is so named because its power output is a suggested 888W, which seems like a suspiciously neat figure.

Back to Achim Schulz and Denon's numbers no-show. 'From a marketing point of view there is always a product there with a bigger number,' he says. 'We cannot control the marketing of crazy TV brands!'

The point here is that some specifications can become meaningless. Television manufacturers used to list contrast ratios that bore no resemblance to the real-world – most have now given up – and perhaps soundbar makers will follow Denon's lead. In the meantime, remember: those numbers are often just numbers ■

Do you peruse specs and manuals before buying new gear? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Mark Craven's fave specification is the infinity-to-one contrast ratio of OLED technology, achievable by basically switching it off





The Hi-Fi Guy

Could loudspeaker technology of the past combine with modern-day processing to deliver the home cinema system of the future? Probably not, admits **Ed Selley** – but he'd love to hear it

FROM THE OUTSIDE, the world of hi-fi can appear homogenous. The perception is that the details vary but we all listen to two speakers and obsess about source equipment. In reality, 'hi-fi' is a collection of sects with the same aim in mind but little to no common ground over how it might be best achieved. And one of the extreme sects are horn speaker fans.

Horn speakers are simple in principle. A driver is mounted at one end of an enclosure that serves to vastly increase the efficiency of the driver itself. We've seen speakers with horn-loaded tweeters in HCC, but tweeters are easy – true horn devotees assemble multi-way systems to cover the full frequency range. **The result is usually vast, complicated and, unless you're an advocate of brutalism, not terribly attractive.**

So why bother? One advantage is that they are staggeringly sensitive. We generally consider speakers with a sensitivity of 90dB to be fairly efficient but many horn designs are comfortably over 100dB – that is to say, they can jeopardise your hearing on a watt or two of input power. The second is that, done right, they are startlingly dynamic. I'm not a true advocate of horn speakers (my normal-sized lounge and possession of a functioning pair of eyes precludes it) but I'm happy to admit that well-implemented horns can perform incredibly.

Golden oldies

Some of the very best horn speakers were found in early cinemas. Western Electric used their huge sensitivity to ensure auditoriums could be filled with sound via the relatively low-power amps of the time. And these systems can sound extraordinarily good. Pictured above is a fettled and restored 83-year-old Western Electric cinema horn system holding its own at the Munich High-End Show a few years ago.

A recent discussion (well, argument) with a 'horn person' over the unsuitability of horns for use in the real world resulted in the revelation that the most relevant modern application for them would actually be a bespoke high-end cinema build, because much of the specialist gear required to get the best from horn speakers exists in AV processors. It's already possible to set crossover and delay settings for speakers, so the same thinking could be used to make the various horn drivers behave themselves (delay really matters when you're trying to get sound to come out of a straight 8in treble horn at the same time as a folded 8ft bass horn). The argument 'to DSP or not to DSP' is one that AV people settled years ago, giving you no hang-ups about sorting out sound issues in the digital domain.

More prosaically, it doesn't really matter if the end result looks like a cross between a pile of landfill and the plumbing scene from *Brazil* because, in a world of acoustically transparent screens, you can put it all behind one. Having done that, some of the extra space taken up by the speakers will be offset against needing much less in the way of amplification – and you can wave your newfound energy efficiency credentials to a bemused world while still having enough power to boil the fluid in your inner ear.

The outcome would be a peculiar combination of near century-old tech and the latest in AV thinking, hopefully offering incredible dynamics and transient speed. Imagine a finely crafted modern soundtrack coming not from conventional dynamic drivers brutalised by a few hundred watts (turning much of that power to heat in the process) but from elementary physics and 1930s knowhow. Go on, you know you want to ■

*Do you own any vintage AV equipment?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Ed Selley's other fave 'discussion' topics include tube vs solid state, vinyl vs CD, and which would win in a fight between Airwolf and Blue Thunder





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In The Mix

Just as the future of streaming platforms doesn't look quite so rosy, there's renewed buzz about the cinema industry. **Jon Thompson** salutes a return to the 'old' ways of movie distribution

NEWS OF NETFLIX'S loss of subscribers in the first quarter of the year came a week before CinemaCon 2022, the gathering in Las Vegas of studios and cinema operators. It's easy to imagine one industry toasting the apparent fall of the other.

The leading streaming company's first reported fall in users in ten years had a quick impact. Netflix's value plummeted by \$50bn overnight, and it subsequently made 150 staff members redundant.

Ahoy, me hearties!

Has the streaming bubble burst? And does that mean cinema is ready to reign supreme once more? Certainly, premiering their projects online has led to a backlash from filmmakers, and studios have been forced to take note. Meanwhile, at CinemaCon, John Fithian, president and CEO of NATO (not that one, but the North American Theatre Operators) said piracy was a major problem with 'day and date' streaming releases. Then there's the issue that films still given traditional theatrical releases have been earning huge amounts, demonstrating the value of a cinema-first approach. *Spider-Man: No Way Home* killed it at the box office, followed by *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* and *The Bad Guys*. And now we have *Top Gun: Maverick* (pictured) flying high in theatres.

The experiment during the pandemic, where the likes of *Wonder Woman 1984* and *Black Widow* were made available for home viewing, was a failure, causing revenues to slide in all areas, especially in the lucrative DVD/BD/4K BD market. **The whole thing is a fragile ecosystem.** You change one element, and it has a trickle-down effect.

Indeed, the business model for streaming is incredibly flawed, and so far has concentrated on subscriber numbers with little to no thought on revenue. Netflix is the most expensive platform, has

the most subscribers, and is still making a loss – and its response to losing customers was to raise the price of its subscriptions yet again, up to £15.99 a month in the UK for its premium-level 4K HDR tier. (If it's still losing money at this price, you to ask how Disney+ hopes to be profitable at £7.99. The answer is, it won't).

Cruise control

One thing that got lost amidst the streaming surge of the last few years is that a cinema release gives a film high perceived value. This is a problem for Netflix, as movies that premiere on the platform are fighting against so much other content. This is the reason why Tom Cruise fought to keep *Top Gun: Maverick's* debut theatrical only. It gives the film a much higher profile, boosting profits. Eventually it will land on a streaming platform, but only after it's gone through the traditional distribution chain.

Such a system would appear to suit everyone. No online premieres rife with piracy, no worries about technical issues scuppering launch night, and catering to both cinemagoers and the stay-at-home audience. And let's not forget that a successful theatrical run continues into physical media sales, the highest profit-per-unit-of-delivery method. There is a reason this is the most tried and trusted way of getting a film to market over the last 50 years. Technology will change but people's perceptions and habits tend not to.

The joy of seeing a new movie in the cinema was something we perhaps took for granted until cinemas were shut. The movie industry turned to streaming as a quick fix. Now it seems the tide is turning back ■

*Which streaming service do you watch the most?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at @johnnyfocal



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Feedback

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No Sharknado? Denied!

Just to be clear: yours is my favourite home cinema magazine by far. But still, there are niggles that make me want to register a complaint or two or three.

Firstly, your 'Movies with Bite' feature [HCC #331] criminally ignored the whole *Sharknado* franchise! I mean, six films that finally elevated killer fish to a whole new level!

Secondly, the space allotted to 'Meh' flicks. The first three big reviews in the last issue (*Death on the Nile*, *The 355* and *Uncharted*) scored an average of 3 stars but were allocated more than three pages of space, whereas *Wild Things*, *The Proposition* and *Vampyr*, which scored an average of 4.5, have to share the room under the stairs on half a page. Shouldn't great films have more space?

That said, wouldn't it be of interest to compare the picture and sound quality of the reviewed 4K discs with the version offered by the streaming portals. Especially Disney+ offerings that are directly competing with the physical media of the House of the Mouse. (that was my third complaint, by the way.)

And finally, one directed not at you, but at the industry. Why the heck is 3D ever more disappearing? The new Sony laser projectors

2022 adventure flick *Uncharted*, starring Tom Holland and Mark Wahlberg



seemingly feature it only with add-on hardware, with the least expensive model missing out entirely. I think this is really disappointing. Hopefully the new *Avatar* flicks can turn the tide...

Patrik Etschmayer

Mark Craven replies: Starting from the top, our killer creature feature did include the *Sharknado* series, albeit in a boxout about production company The Asylum. We felt this franchise – and some of its others – merited its own little space. Also, the films are all a bit

Back in love with Bond

Yes, I have started a James Bond marathon on Amazon's Prime Video [Film Fanatic, HCC #331], so perhaps I am more pleased than Anton van Beek about Amazon now owning the MGM movie archive. I've started the series from the beginning, naturally, and I'm hugely enjoying the earlier movies. It's been a while since I watched Connery's Bond, but he was – and always will be – the best. I'm now into the Roger Moore era, which is also really fun, but the movies do lack something that Connery brought to the role.

Brian S

Anton van Beek: Connery's run of Bond films contains my favourite (*From Russia With Love*) and maintained a generally high quality over nine years. He somewhat ruined his legacy by returning in 1983's *Never Say Never Again*. Feel free to skip that one when you get to it...



From *Russia With Love*: Connery's best?

rubbish (aren't they?) compared to the likes of *The Shallows*, *The Meg*, *Deep Blue Sea* and, of course, *Jaws*.

Regards how we allocate space in our Playback section, we prefer to give disc releases of new movies their due, even if they turn out to be a bit 'meh' (and *Uncharted* has its merits in a completely-derivative-of-the-Indiana-Jones-franchise kinda way). *Wild Things*, *Vampyr* and *The Proposition* are all back-catalogue releases – many readers will have seen these before.

Furthermore, with the release schedule still feeling the after-effects of the pandemic, last issue was a bit light on 'blockbuster cinema' (as is this issue, actually). Thankfully, things are looking up now, with *Jurassic World Dominion*, *Top Gun: Maverick* (which had its release held back by two years!) and *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* marking a return to popcorn frolics. Plus there's *The Batman* hitting 4K Blu-ray this month. Hooray!

As for comparing 4K BD movie releases to their streamed counterparts, we have considered this, but with the adaptive bitrate delivery method of streaming, there's always variance in how a streamed movie is going to look. The upshot is, if you want the best picture quality, you'll almost certainly get it on the disc.

Lastly, 3D. The answer to the question 'why is it disappearing?' is because very few people are watching it. As you say, *Avatar 2* might kickstart a second coming of silly spex appreciation in cinemas, but whether that will translate to the home remains to be seen. My guess is it won't.

Sony's omission of a 3D transmitter on the new XW5000ES projector does seem strange, however, considering its £5,999 price point.

Get my 'bar and TV talking

I have just bought a Panasonic 55JZ1500B OLED TV and wanted to connect it to my Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2 soundbar and PVID subwoofer.

I and the installers (from John Lewis) have been unable to get any sound from them both despite following all the instructions – twice, with two different sets of people. The Panasonic's own speakers do work well, but not as good as the soundbar and subwoofer did on my old Sony TV.

I have also contacted the John Lewis Tech Help Desk and also Panasonic's help desk, but they were of no help!

So can you help me please? Otherwise I am going to have to consider whether I have to a) listen to just the TV speakers and get rid of my nice sound system, b) upgrade the TV to the JZ2000, listen to better TV speakers and get rid of my nice sound system, or c) buy a new soundbar, put an extra jumper on and turn off the heating!
Quentin Allen

★ Star Letter...

Dolby Atmos is music to my ears!

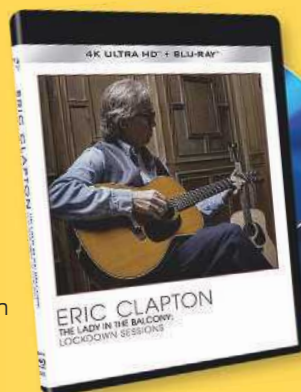
It's interesting to see more Dolby Atmos Blu-rays and streaming options for those like me who are hybrid enthusiasts for both films and music.

I have long thought the AV hardware manufacturers were missing a trick to capture more hi-fi enthusiasts, and the development of Dolby Atmos recordings now available on Blu-ray and Tidal streaming is great news for those who like both films and music.

I recently bought the Eric Clapton lockdown sessions on Blu-ray Dolby Atmos [*Eric Clapton – The Lady in the Balcony*, from Universal Music Group, pictured below] and was completely mesmerised by the experience of seeing and hearing a live performance in a beautiful setting. It really conveyed the emotion of music at its best.

The HCC article on the Tears for Fears Blu-ray release [*A Tipping Point for Atmos*, HCC #330] again suggests the music industry is seeing the potential to offer music fans a real improvement in sound over more traditional mediums like vinyl and compact discs – it really can be that good.

My only beef is that as usual with new frontier mediums there is the usual learning how to do it to get the best sound. For example, there is now lots of Atmos music on Tidal but how to you get it to play on your AV system? The usual streaming via Wi-Fi or USB/digital connection doesn't do it. HDMI is the answer but it takes a while to understand how it all works. So now the AV enthusiast can give the hi-fi buff, with their sometimes very expensively put together systems, a real run for their money. And all down to well recorded Dolby Atmos music.
Peter Andrew



Mark Craven replies: One thing your letter has

made me ponder is the growing trend in the world of hi-fi to offer HDMI ARC connections on integrated stereo amplifiers. An actual HDMI input might be more useful for music lovers, as it would let an Amazon Fire TV Stick plug in for Tidal Dolby Atmos.

But (and this is a big but) hi-fi enthusiasts are generally happy with just two speakers and aren't really in the mood for more. So while artists and producers might be getting onboard the Dolby Atmos train, I'm not sure there'll be many people waiting at the 'two-channel' station to hop on. The winners here are those of us who can listen to these Dolby Atmos music mixes through multichannel systems we already own.

As for Dolby Atmos music on Tidal, one issue I have with it is you have to make the effort to track it down! I do the majority of my music listening via my smartphone or PC, when I'm working or mooching about, through headphones or a wireless

speaker, often listening to Tidal recommendations. None of these are ever in Atmos, of course, meaning I don't keep abreast of what's been released.

Star letter writer Peter grabs copies of the prison flick *Caged Heat* and the crime spree action movie *Crazy Mama* on Blu-ray, courtesy of 101 Films. The first two films helmed by acclaimed director Jonathan (The Silence of the Lambs) Demme, this pair of Roger Corman-produced 1970s exploitation classics recently made their UK Blu-ray debuts, accompanied by commentaries, interviews and other bonus goodies.

Mark Craven replies: Hi Quentin. I'm not entirely confident I can help as this should be a relatively easy connection, so I'm surprised the John Lewis technicians haven't been able to get it sorted.

Anyway, to connect the Panorama 2 soundbar to the Panasonic OLED TV (the

PVID will then connect to the Panorama via the 'bar's subwoofer pre-out, as it would have been before), hook up via HDMI ARC. Use the input on the Panasonic TV labelled ARC/eARC (which I think is HDMI 2) and the HDMI socket labelled 'Out' on the B&W soundbar (rather than one of the three inputs!).

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I expect you will then need to adjust some settings on the JZ1500 (please note I am basing this on reading the online manual, as I don't have that TV to hand!).

Find the Sound option in the menu system, and turn eARC to 'on'. You'll also need to change the audio output (Speaker Selection) from 'TV' to 'Home Cinema'. If the TV is in its default Auto sound mode (selectable under the HDMI Audio tab) it should now output a Dolby Digital signal to the Panorama for it to decode. If this isn't working, try setting the TV audio output to PCM.

You could also try not using HDMI ARC and instead connect the TV and soundbar via their digital optical audio connections, again selecting Auto or PCM output.

Don't think about upgrading your new Panasonic set or B&W gear just yet – this system should all work fine.

4K space for extras?

Thanks as always for the usual comprehensive Home Cinema Choice edition for Spring 2022.

Now, if my memory serves me correctly there is currently insufficient available space left on a 4K disc for any extras at all? These were usually found within the standard Blu-ray disc accompanying the 4K issue. Which of course means a loss to us, 'the viewing public'.

It seems to me we are going to be taken for a ride, as surely the retail price of these discs is likely to rise in time due to international events? Vic Brash DipSM

Anton van Beek replies: Assuming you're writing this in response to some labels no

longer bundling Blu-ray copies of films with 4K discs, I must point out that there's no reason at all why a 4K pater can't also contain extras. There's certainly not insufficient space – the discs offer more space than ever before.

And, in fact, there are single-disc 4K releases out there that come with bonus features. One is Second Sight's remaster of Nicolas Winding Refn's brilliant 2011 film *Drive*, reviewed on page 93. Here they've found space for a commentary track, a 70-minute video interview with Refn, and more.

There's still a *Drive* release that does come with the film on Blu-ray, also throwing in a hardcover book, the original novel, and art cards. Yet as the Blu-ray version contains just the same extras, you start to wonder who would want it.

Arrow Video is another UK label that releases 4K movies without an accompanying Blu-ray version (although it does also issue 'dual-format' sets, such as the incoming Dario Argento chiller *Tenebrae*) and these aren't stripped of extra features. Its recent *Candyman* 4K Blu-ray (see p92) packs in two commentaries, six interviews, a video essay and three short films.

So it would seem studios that leave their 4K Blu-rays totally devoid of bonus material are doing so out of laziness, rather than a lack of space. Unless, perhaps, the 4K HDR movie is four hours long... ■



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Question:

Which screenwriter created the Daleks for *Doctor Who*?

Answer:

- A) Robert Holmes B) Russell T. Davies
C) Terry Nation



Cult Classics

Studiocanal's new Cult Classics range has kicked off with restored versions of Walter Hill's *Extreme Prejudice* (1987), plus two films from Enzo G. Castellari – *High Crime* (1973) and *Kill Them All and Come Back Alone* (1968). All three are available to own now on Blu-ray, DVD and Digital – and we have one set of the three Blu-rays up for grabs!

Question:

Walter Hill was a producer on which popular series of sci-fi-horror movies?

Answer:

- A) *Alien*
B) *Mimic*
C) *Species*



Blue Bayou

Inspired by true events, *Blue Bayou* tells the moving story of a family fighting for their future in the US's answer to the Windrush scandal. *Blue Bayou* is available to own on

Blu-ray and DVD from June 27, and thanks to Dazzler Media we have three Blu-ray copies to be won!

Question:

Blue Bayou's Alicia Vikander previously portrayed which videogame character on the bigscreen?

Answer:

- A) Princess Zelda B) Chun-Li
C) Lara Croft



The Terror: Infamy

The spooktacular supernatural TV series *The Terror: Infamy* is now available to own on DVD and Blu-ray, both individually and in a boxset

with the original season of *The Terror*. Thanks to Acorn Media International we have a copy of *The Terror: Seasons 1 and 2* Blu-ray boxset to give away!

Question:

The Terror: Infamy actor George Takei played which character in the original *Star Trek* television series?

Answer:

- A) Nyota Uhura B) Hikaru Sulu C) Spock

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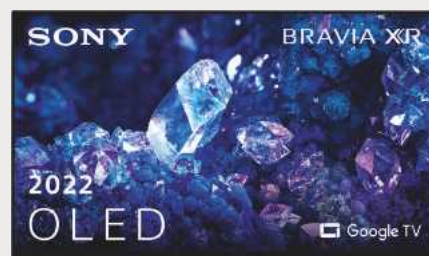
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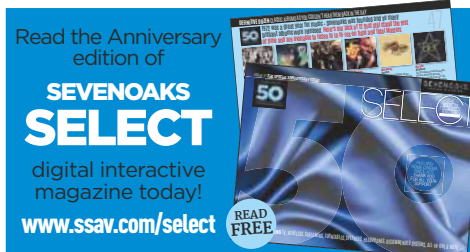
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PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **MORBIUS** Bloodsucking comic book movie flies out of the Spider-verse **DRIVE** Ryan Gosling's 'wheelman' has a new 4K ride **SPECIES** Four-film sci-fi horror franchise gets the boxset treatment **ALFRED HITCHCOCK** Another UHD 'Classics Collection' for the Master of Suspense **JACKASS FOREVER** It's daft, but you'll still laugh... **& MORE!**

Fast and fur-ious

Turning Red → Disney → Ultra HD Blu-ray

Pixar animation *Turning Red* blends coming of age drama with family-friendly fantasy and a giant red panda. We soak up Disney's Blu-ray release on p89

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

'Are you okay? You look a bit under the weather...'



Vampiric anti-hero kinda sucks

Jared Leto battles some unwanted urges, plus smeary CGI, in the latest Spider-verse spin-off



→ MORBIUS

With the instantly forgettable – and, at 104 minutes, surprisingly brief – *Morbius*, Sony might have driven a stake through the heart of its embryonic cinematic universe based around Spider-Man's comic book friends and foes.

Jared Leto stars as Michael Morbius, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist who tries to cure a rare blood disease by injecting himself with bat DNA. On the upside, this experiment sort of works and even gives him some cool abilities (sonar sense, the ability to turn into a smudge that moves in bullet-time). On the downside, it also gives him a CGI scary face and a thirst for human blood. Cue lots of brooding, and some fights with another 'living vampire' who's had the same treatment (played, with some welcome flamboyance, by ex-*Doctor Who* actor Matt Smith).

While history tells us that *Morbius*'s release was delayed for two years due to the pandemic, the film is so boringly generic you'd swear it had been stuck on the shelf since the 1990s. Next up from Sony is *Kraven The Hunter*. We hope it's more fun.

Picture: Digitally captured in 6.5K using a combination of Panavision DXL2 and Arri Alexa 65 cams, then finished as a 4K digital intermediate, *Morbius* certainly arrives on Blu-ray looking polished. That said, this AVC 2.40:1 Full HD encode is occasionally held back from greatness by the qualities of the film itself.

Large chunks of the movie take place at night, and these sequences are crisply resolved for the

most part, with shadow detail providing some much needed image depth. However, things fall apart a bit during the VFX-heavy finale (beginning Chapter 15), which all-too-frequently comes down to a purple-tinted CGI smear chasing a grey CGI smear across a dark, muddy cityscape. Add in some rapid-fire editing and you can be left trying to guess at what is happening based solely on the sound mix. None of this is the fault of the Blu-ray disc, of course, but consider yourself warned.

Audio: We can only assume the 4K BD's Dolby Atmos track is a bit of a superstar, because the DTS-HD MA 5.1 track on our review Blu-ray is itself no slouch. There's a dynamic and richly detailed sonic soundscape to savour.

A sequence where bats swarm around Morbius (Chapter 1) envelops you with surround effects, while his experiments with his new-found sonar abilities (Chapter 7) hit with deep, bassy 'whomps' and show the precision of the track's spatial steering as a squash ball bounces around the soundstage. Then, as you'd expect, the two big fight sequences (in Chapters 11 and 15) bring all these elements together in a fine example of blockbuster audio.

Extras: Don't go looking for too much insight into the movie, or its long development history, from this disc's assortment of extras. In addition to five short featurettes looking at the production in general, the title character, stunts, visual effects and the supporting cast, there are some outtakes/bloopers, a guide to the film's Spider-verse/MCU Easter Eggs, and four brief promos. **AvB**

HCC VERDICT

Morbius

→ Sony Pictures
→ All-region BD → £25

WE SAY: Dull, dreary and memorable for all the wrong reasons, *Morbius* gives superheroes and vampires a bad name. Nice soundmix, though.

Movie: ★★☆☆☆

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★☆☆☆

OVERALL: ★★☆☆☆

The Battle at Lake Changjin

CineAsia → Region B BD
£20



Chinese cinema's answer to 2001's *Pearl Harbor*, this Michael Bay-like mix of patriotism and cracking action retells the story of a victory

for the Chinese army over US forces during the Korean War. It hit a chord with local audiences, becoming China's highest-grossing movie ever, but for the rest of us the three-hour running time and thin characters can be a drag. Cine Asia's Blu-ray looks and sounds suitably spectacular, although a \$200m dollar war movie surely warrants an Atmos track. **MC**



Sing 2: Special Ed.

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£25



Writer-director Garth Jennings' gang of singing cartoon critters returns for another toe-tapping jukebox musical in this animated sequel.

Bigger, bolder and crazier than its unexpectedly enjoyable 2016 predecessor, not even a supporting turn from Bono can spoil things. While it's annoying that *Sing 2* didn't get a UK 4K BD release, this Blu-ray's colourful 1.85:1-framed 1080p encode is exceptional, and the Full HD platter does at least feature the same roof-raising Dolby Atmos soundmix. **AvB**



Chucky: Season One

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£30



The killer doll from the *Child's Play* movies now has his own TV series. Going back to basics to begin with, this smartly written eight-episode debut

season introduces a new cast of characters for Chucky to torment, before adding links (and characters from) the seven films that preceded it – it pays to revisit those before diving in. Short on extras (four deleted scenes and an 11-minute featurette), this double-disc BD release impresses in AV terms. Full HD images are clean and rich, and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 packs a wallop. **AvB**



Jackass Forever

Paramount → All-region BD
£25



Well-told stories, strong performances and visual panache are all well and good, but sometimes you just need to watch grown men doing painful, juvenile stunts. Over and over again.

Jackass Forever isn't big or clever (it's actually the opposite of those things), but it definitely scratches a particular itch, and is often very, very funny. Bar a *Godzilla* parody opening sequence, this 1.78:1 Full HD presentation isn't particularly cinematic, but the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio perfectly captures the wide range of pained screams. **AvB**



Disney grins and bears it

Pixar stirs up plenty of puberty-related panda-monium with its latest 'toon

→ TURNING RED

Adolescence can be a difficult time for any kid. For 13-year-old Chinese-Canadian Mei Lee (voiced by Rosalie Chiang) it's made even worse when she wakes up one morning and discovers that, thanks to a hereditary curse, she now transforms into a giant red panda whenever she feels strong emotions. And being a teenager, that's a lot.

Thankfully, there's a ritual that can cure her – but it can only be performed on the same night that Mei's favourite boy band is playing. What's a girl to do?

Subject of a ridiculous – and mercifully short-lived – controversy (a cartoon dares to show boxes of sanitary products... Won't somebody think of the children?), *Turning Red* doesn't join the likes of *Wall-E*, *Ratatouille* or *Toy Story 2* as one of Pixar's top-tier efforts, but this inclusive animated coming-of-age story is a fun and frothy adventure. It amuses and charms in equal measure, regardless of whether or not the story speaks to you directly.

Picture: It should come as no surprise to discover that Disney's *Turning Red* Blu-ray release looks absolutely lovely. Sourced from a 4K digital intermediate, this 1.85:1-framed 1080p image is overflowing with richly saturated colours, and the textural details of the CG animation aren't lost in the encode. Depictions of fur have long been used to show off the benefits of hi-def, and the close-ups of Mei's red panda form are no exception. Coupled with deep blacks and crisp highlights, this sense of pure, crisp detail gives the animation a three-dimensional quality throughout. Presumably the 4K BD looks even better.



Audio: While this Blu-ray's visuals are excellent, the audio is a touch underwhelming. Even if you remember to head to the disc's sound menu and switch to DTS-HD MA 7.1 (the Blu-ray defaults to a DTS-HD HR 5.1 mix), it remains a front-heavy affair. Admittedly, there's a pleasingly wide and lively L/C/R spread, but the overall dynamic range is hampered by a lack of depth to the low-end. You'll also need to turn the volume up several notches to really get the best out of the mix. The film's Atmos soundmix is exclusive to Disney's UHD release.

Extras: *Turning Red* comes to Blu-ray with a commentary featuring director Domee Shi, producer Lindsey Collins and director of photography Mahyar Aboussaeedi; a pleasingly detailed 15-minute featurette about the amount of work that goes into creating a single scene; and a nine-minute featurette covering the '10 steps' that go into creating a fictional boy band. **AvB**



Turning Red director Domee Shi started at Pixar as a 22-year-old intern in 2011

HCC VERDICT

Turning Red

→ Disney
→ All-region BD → £25

WE SAY: Pixar's frothy coming-of-age story is let down on Blu-ray by underpowered audio.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

A Hitch in time saves... five

Another batch of Alfred Hitchcock movies makes the journey from Universal's vault to Ultra HD Blu-ray...



→ THE ALFRED HITCHCOCK CLASSICS COLLECTION VOL. 2

It's been the best part of two years since Universal released its first *Alfred Hitchcock Classics Collection* boxset, featuring 4K upgrades of *Rear Window* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958), *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963).

'If you tell me your name's Bond one more time, I'm leaving you...'

Now we have a second volume to go with it, although having collected four of the legendary filmmaker's best movies in the first volume, what does this second 4K set hold?

It kicks off with Hitchcock's first film for Universal, the spy thriller *Saboteur* (1942). Feeling both like a do-over of some of the director's earlier British films and a precursor to the better known *North by Northwest* (1958), this artful melodrama casts Robert Cummings as a man on the run after being wrongly accused of starting a fire at the aircraft plant where he worked.

Next up is the sublimely twisted *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943). Hitchcock's favourite of his films, this tense and skin-crawling psychological thriller stars Teresa Wright as the bored teenager who comes to suspect that the uncle she adores (Joseph Cotten) may in fact be a murderer.

Leaping forward a decade, *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) is a very different type of film. Sure, there's a dead body, but here it's the setup for a wonderfully weird and wacky black comedy starring Edmund Gwynn, John Forsythe and Shirley MacLaine. Low-key for Hitchcock, but something of a gem.

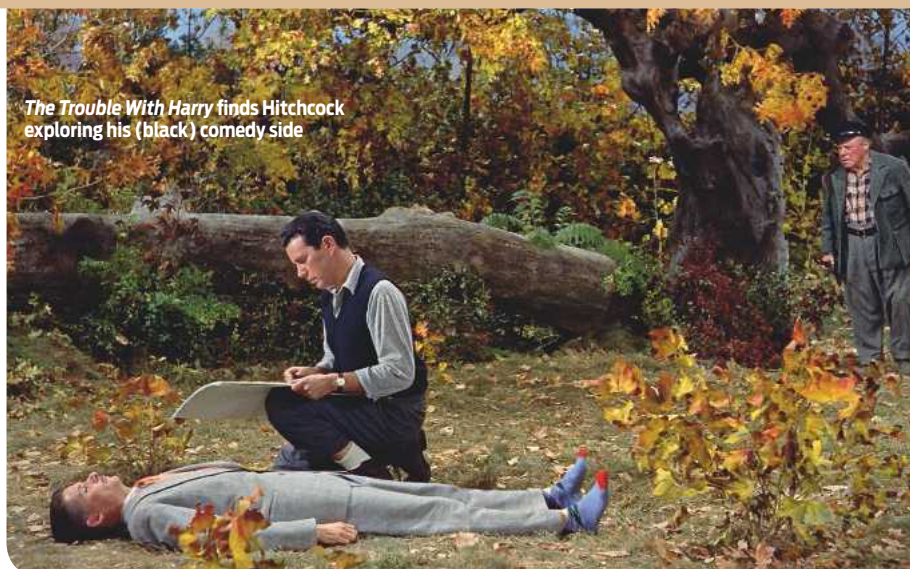
Starring Sean Connery and Tippi Hedren, *Marnie* (1964) is perhaps the best known title in the boxset. A dark tale of emotional manipulation and sexual violence, it was almost universally despised on its original release, and while a critical reassessment followed, it remains Hitchcock's most divisive – and controversial – work.

Rounding out the set is *Family Plot* (1976), the director's finale feature. A somewhat disappointing runaround involving two separate stories that eventually cross over (a kidnapping and the search for a missing person), more than anything else it feels like a film out of time – certainly not made in the year between *Jaws* and *Star Wars*.

At best the films here are second-tier Hitchcock, but second-tier Hitchcock is still Hitchcock, and at least four of the five are a whole lot of fun. Only *Family Plot* continues to disappoint, failing to live up to the filmmaker's lofty standards.



Bruce Dern stars in Hitchcock's final film, *Family Plot*



The Trouble With Harry finds Hitchcock exploring his (black) comedy side

Picture: Each film features a 4K encode in the original aspect ratio (1.37:1 for *Saboteur* and *Shadow of a Doubt*, 1.85:1 for the other three) with HDR10 grading.

The black-and-white 4K presentations of those first two films look spectacular, showcasing excellent sharpness and clarity, organic grain fields and pitch-perfect black levels. The introduction of HDR is also vital here, increasing the sense of contrast in the monochrome photography, and ushering in smoother greyscale gradations.

Shot in large-format Vista Vision, *The Trouble with Harry* is probably the pick of the boxset's 4K encodes. There's a rich level of depth and detail to its gorgeous Vermont countryside exteriors, and this is made all the more delightful by the lifelike colours the HDR/wide colour grade brings to the autumnal foliage (which apparently includes leaves stuck on to trees, because the production arrived in late September to find many of them had already fallen off).

It's *Marnie* and *Family Plot* which provide the biggest upgrades from their respective Blu-ray releases, neither of which looked particularly great (*Family Plot* was, in fact, an edge-enhanced, DNR-smear disaster). These 4K remasters are superior in every regard, from detailing and colour accuracy to dynamic range, giving both movies a genuinely film-like appearance. *Marnie*'s opticals means there is still a softness to some of the film's shots, but that's an unavoidable limitation of the source material.

Audio: Unlike the previous volume, which featured DTS:X and DTS-HD MA 7.1 remixes on two of its films (*Psycho* and *Vertigo*), all five platters in this set stick with DTS-HD MA dual-mono soundtracks. There's therefore not a lot to get excited about from a home cinema perspective, but these lossless tracks appear entirely source-faithful and beautifully restored. The music scores sound great (*The Trouble With Harry* marking Hitchcock's first collaboration with Bernard Herrmann) and dialogue is crystal clear.

Extras: There are no new extras in the set, with everything dating right back to the films' DVD releases. As such, each movie comes with a retrospective documentary, photo/art galleries, and trailers. Nothing you haven't seen before then, but at least they're all included on the 4K platters as well as the accompanying 1080p BDs. **AvB**



Hitchcock followed 1942's *Saboteur* (top) with *Shadow of a Doubt* the next year

HCC VERDICT

The Alfred Hitchcock Classics Collection Vol. 2

→ Universal → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £70

WE SAY: Not Hitchcock's best, but only one of the five is a dud – and even that looks better than ever.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



Sniper Elite 5

Rebellion → PS5, PS4, Xbox Series X/S, Xbox One, PC → £54.99 (free on Xbox Game Pass)

The *Sniper Elite* series, which debuted 17 years ago, has gathered a loyal, dedicated following. Now there's a fifth major outing for Karl Fairburne and his long-ranged weaponry, and fans will be overjoyed. That's partly because, rather than rip up the rule book, developer Rebellion has successfully tweaked the formula. *Sniper Elite 5* is still a mission-based, third-person tactical shooter that relies more on stealth than gung-ho action, yet brings some new features to the war table that make it the best in the franchise yet.

This time, Fairburne finds himself in France, tasked with preparing the local resistance for the oncoming D-Day landings. However, along the way he discovers Nazi plans that could scupper the Allies before they even get to Normandy, and so sets out to foil the so-called Operation Kraken.

This takes place over eight lengthy campaign missions with some of the biggest maps in the series. They have also been crafted to provide multiple routes and opportunities to complete set tasks, including optional side missions and other high-ranking Axis officers to nobble. Each mission can take hours to complete, depending on your strategy and how much you want to achieve.

Adding to this sense of value are multiplayer modes, including 'survival', whereby you and three friends take on increasingly harder waves of enemies, and 'invasion'. Switch the latter on and your campaign can have an anonymous player take the role of an enemy sniper, eager to blow you away. In reverse, you can hunt them down and send them to an early grave too.

Our only quibble with the game is that, in order to create a decent version for older consoles, the graphics seem to have been compromised. PS5 and Xbox Series X/S presentation is good, with fine details thanks to real-world location scanning techniques being employed, but we can't help but feel they could look better still. It does run at a slick 60 frames-per-second, though, and has a superb soundtrack to boot.



Candyman: Limited Edition [1992]

Arrow Video → Ultra HD Blu-ray
£30



Bernard Rose's 1992 adaptation of Clive Barker's short story *The Forbidden* is the best screen version of the author's writings, also standing as one of the very best Hollywood horrors of the

1990s – a dark and beautiful plunge into the depths of urban folklore. While this 4K upgrade isn't a major leap forward over Arrow's 2019 Blu-ray when it comes to pixel finery, the Dolby Vision grade makes it all look that much richer. The Atmos remix, meanwhile, does wonders for Tony Todd's booming voice and Philip Glass's celebrated score. **AvB**



Cat's Eye

Studiocanal → Ultra HD Blu-ray & Region B BD
£30



Cujo director Lewis Teague made a second trip into the world of Stephen King with this 1985 anthology featuring adaptations of two of the writer's short stories (*Quitters*,

Inc and *The Ledge*) and a new tale penned specifically for the film (*General*), all linked by a cat, which becomes the hero of the latter. A middling entry in King's cinematic pantheon, *Cat's Eye* arrives on UHD BD with an authentically film-like 4K image, helped in part by a subtle approach to HDR and what we're told was extensive restoration work. A director's commentary, interviews and trailer make up the extras. **MC**



The Men

BFI → Region B BD & R2 DVD
£20



Marlon Brando made his film debut in this 1950 feature from future *High Noon* director Fred Zimmerman, playing a paraplegic former soldier struggling to accept the love of a good woman (Teresa Wight). An intense and affecting drama – albeit one not without some sardonic humour – *The Men* comes to Blu-ray with an appealing 1.37:1 black-and-white encode and cleaned-up LPCM dual-mono audio. Welcome extras include a commentary and two vintage shorts (1947's *Return to Action* and 1950's *The Undeclared*). **AvB**





Reborn thriller is a real joyride

Reminiscent of the classic crime flicks of the 1970s, *Drive* is now a 4K Dolby Vision hero

→ DRIVE

Originally in cinemas in 2011, Nicolas Winding Refn's slick, stylish, toe-curlingly violent and sweetly romantic 'neon-noir' stars Ryan Gosling as the unnamed Hollywood stuntman who also happens to be a cool-as-ice getaway driver for hire. When the taciturn 'Driver' gets involved with his neighbour Irene (Carey Mulligan) and her young son Benicio (Kaden Leos), his carefully ordered life is thrown into turmoil. Simply sublime.

Picture: *Drive* is a textbook example of how technical specifications only tell part of the story. Captured primarily with Arri Alexa digital cameras (although some smaller systems were also utilised for in-car shots) and finished as a 2K DI, on paper it doesn't look like the film is tailor-made for a 4K presentation. Then you actually watch it.

Sourced from a new director-approved 4K master (produced by the original post-production company) and featuring HDR10/Dolby Vision grades created by the film's original colourist, *Drive* ranks among the best-looking UHD releases we've ever seen.

From facial close-ups of Gosling to overhead shots of the city at night, this pristine encode exhibits breathtaking amounts of textural info. Then there's the colour punch. Be it the neon pink of the opening credits, the ochre and blue street lighting, or the eye-popping array of primary hues filling the shelves in the Big 6 Market (Chapter 2), colour reproduction is superb. Black levels are also solid throughout, while the HDR pass peaks at eye-scorching levels

as the golden interior of the apartment elevator burns brighter and brighter during Chapter 9.

Audio: As well as the DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack that featured on the original Blu-ray release, this 4K disc houses a new Dolby Atmos remix. This makes the most of the film's mannered sonics, with overhead effects employed sparingly (although there is a very effective helicopter flyover during the film's opening getaway), and atmospherics expanded upwards for a more expansive feel.

Especially satisfying is the scale it brings to *Drive*'s electro pop soundtrack. Driving sequences are endowed with deep engine-revving snarls, while the metal-on-metal action of Chapter 7's car chase has a crispness and intricacy that contrasts nicely with the cringe-inducingly moist and squishy violence the Driver dishes out in person.

Extras: This single-disc 4K release from Second Sight features an entirely new set of extras. The highlight is a fascinating commentary from film critic Peter Bradshaw and director Nicolas Winding Refn, and this is accompanied by a 13-minute visual essay exploring the different stylistic approaches to the film's three main driving scenes; a slightly unfocused 75-minute zoom chat with the director, editor Mat Newman and composer Cliff Martinez; and an additional 19-minute interview with Newman.

For an additional £30, you can buy a Limited Edition set that adds a Blu-ray of the film; a 240-page book containing essays, storyboards and an interview with *Drive* author James Sallis; the original novel; and seven art cards. **AvB**



Carey Mulligan (left) co-stars as Irene, neighbour to Ryan Gosling's 'Driver'



HCC VERDICT

Drive

→ Second Sight
→ Ultra HD Blu-ray → £25

WE SAY: Nicolas Winding Refn's lean, mean cult favourite hasn't lost any of its impact, and receives a superb 4K upgrade.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



Mobsters get marked for life

David Cronenberg swaps body horror for body art in this brutal gangster thriller

→ EASTERN PROMISES

Eastern Promises exposes a dark underbelly in London of Russian mobsters and human trafficking. Released in 2007, it's one of director David Cronenberg's more accessible films, although the Canadian auteur doesn't shy away from the violence and inhumanity at the heart of this sub-culture where a man's life-story is etched onto his skin in ink.

A tight script from *Peaky Blinders* creator Steven Knight gives Cronenberg plenty to work with, and he's aided by an uncompromising performance from regular collaborator Viggo Mortensen. There's also solid support from Naomi Watts, Vincent Cassel and Armin Mueller-Stahl, resulting in a film that's hard to watch but ultimately rewarding.

Picture: This UHD disc from US label Kino Lorber uses a new master approved and colour-graded by Cronenberg's regular cameraman Peter Suschitzky, who also lensed a little film called *The Empire Strikes Back*. Correctly presented in the film's 1.85:1 theatrical aspect ratio, the imagery is often stunning. A native 4K scan of the original 35mm camera negative has revealed all the fine ink-work on Mortensen's body, and every pore in the many facial close-ups.

However, while the picture is undeniably detailed, it's the cinematography that really impresses. Considering the dark nature of the subject matter, the picture is surprisingly textured and colourful. The HDR10 and Dolby Vision grades usher in deep blacks, detailed shadows and refined highlights, while the saturated colours add nuance to London streets and mahogany-panelled drawing rooms. A clean transfer and high bit-rate round out a flawless presentation.



Audio: While not the kind of movie you'd use to demo a new sound system, *Eastern Promises'* DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix is balanced and effective, with some nice surround effects and occasional use of the lower frequencies.

There are plenty of atmospheric moments in the street scenes and interiors, while the famous bathhouse assault sounds suitably meaty. Howard Shore, another longtime Cronenberg collaborator, delivers a score that matches the film's sombre tone and is rendered with precision. Dialogue has clarity, which is useful in a film full of thick accents.

Extras: Extras are housed on the included region-locked Blu-ray, and include a new 11-minute interview with Steven Knight, plus archival on-set chats with Cronenberg and the cast. There are also short featurettes about the significance of tattoos in the Russian mob, the bathhouse fight sequence, and Naomi Watts learning to ride a motorbike. **SW**



HCC VERDICT

Eastern Promises

→ Kino Lorber → Ultra HD Blu-ray & Region A BD → £30 (US import)

WE SAY: The violence may be ugly, but Cronenberg's film, in this native 4K HDR presentation, looks lush.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Extreme Prejudice

Studiocanal → Region B BD
£23



Walter Hill's 1987 neo-Western follows Nick Nolte's border town cop dealing with an old friend turned drug dealer, while a military black-ops team is running a top-secret mission of its own. *Extreme Prejudice's* prolonged production may result in a few narrative hiccups, but if you want to watch tough guys doing tough guy stuff, it's a blast. This BD's 1.85:1 Full HD encode looks terrific, and is supported by a choice of stereo or 5.1 DTS-HD. Extras include a chat track, interviews, vintage EPK, trailers and a stills gallery. **AvB**



Licorice Pizza

Universal → All-region BD
£25



Paul Thomas Anderson takes us on a trip back to 1973 Hollywood with this meandering but enjoyable tale of a 15-year-old actor who already has one foot in adulthood, and the directionless 25-year-old girl he meets. This Blu-ray release also proves to be quite the charmer, thanks to an authentically cinematic 2.40:1 transfer and high-fidelity DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack. The only real letdown is the accompanying extras, which boil down to camera tests, deleted footage and a compilation of behind-the-scenes imagery. **AvB**



The Pemini Organisation

Indicator → All-region BD
£30



British film outfit The Pemini Organisation made one short (1972's tense two-hander *Hunted*) and two features (1973 spy thriller *Assassin* and 1974 romantic mystery *Moments*) before disbanding. Little seen since then, the films have been rescued from the archives for this extras-packed set. Restored 4K scans of the trio are housed across two discs, and while still exhibiting some issues (including using VHS sources to replace missing frames), look quite impressive. **AvB**



O. Henry's Full House

Signal One → Region B BD
£15



Adapting five tales by noted short story author O. Henry (aka William Sydney Porter), this 1952 anthology is mainly notable for the array of talent both in front and behind the camera, including Henry Hathaway, Farley Granger, Howard Hawks, Charles Laughton, Anne Baxter, Richard Widmark and Marilyn Monroe. Signal One's BD houses a clean and sharp 1.37:1 black-and-white encode of this 70-year-old film. Extras include a slightly dry commentary from an O. Henry expert and 19-minute featurette about the author. **AvB**



Days of Bagnold Summer

Anti-Worlds → Region B BD
£20



The film directing debut of Simon Bird, the touching and funny *Days of the Bagnold Summer* marks the former *Inbetweeners* star as a talent

in the making behind the camera.

Adapted from a graphic novel by Joff Winterhart, the story doesn't do much you haven't seen before, but succeeds through Bird's assured direction and the performances from co-leads Earl Cave and Monica Dolan. As well as a crisp 2.40:1 Full HD encode, the Blu-ray features some fun and informative bonuses. **AvB**



The Terror: Infamy

Acorn Media → All-region BD
£30



The second season of this anthology show pitches up during WW2 for a mix of real and supernatural horrors, with a tale of Japanese Americans

imprisoned in internment camps haunted by a vengeful spectre. The historical side of this chiller is well handled, yet the supernatural elements aren't quite as effective, and are stretched a little too thin across the 10 episodes. While the 1.78:1 1080p encode is up to spec, Acorn once again limits a native 5.1 soundmix to a 'lossy' DTS presentation. **AvB**



Caged Heat

101 Films → Region B BD
£15



The debut of future *The Silence of the Lambs* helmer Jonathan Demme, this 1974 cult hit rises above the bawdy aspects of the 'women-in-prison'

genre for something altogether weirder and more inventive. The film's 1.85:1 image has been nicely spruced, but the LPCM soundmix is hampered by the source material, veering from harsh and tinny to muffled at the drop of a hat. Vintage extras include a chat-track featuring Demme, cinematographer Tak Fujimoto and actress Erica Gavin, plus an interview with producer Roger Corman. **AvB**



Parallel Mothers

Pathé → Region B BD
£25



Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar's heartfelt melodrama focuses on two unmarried pregnant women, one a middle-aged

photographer (Penélope Cruz) the other a frightened teenager (Milena Smit). The two share a room in hospital while waiting to give birth and become friends, only for fate to intervene in a way neither could have predicted. Shot and finished at 4K, *Parallel Mothers* comes to Blu-ray with a stunning 1.85:1 Full HD encode that highlights the director's typically dense and colourful staging. **AvB**



Don't bank on a second date

Beauty is only skin deep in this quartet of amorous alien flicks

→ SPECIES 1-4: DELUXE COLLECTOR'S EDITION

A box office hit in 1995, *Species* is a dumb-but-fun slice of sci-fi horror starring Natasha Henstridge as a sexy alien-human hybrid who breaks free from the lab where she was grown and heads to LA to find a mate. With no new ideas beyond flipping the gender of its alien hybrid, 1998's *Species II* is a much seedier affair with enough blood and gore to rival the trashiest Italian exploitationers of the 1980s.

Six years later, *Species III* debuted – not in cinemas, but on the Syfy channel. Essentially 'Species Goes to College', this oddly lifeless affair drags its muddled story out to 112 tedious minutes. A final instalment, *Species: The Awakening*, followed on Syfy in 2007. Again it's a fairly cheap production, but one that has a bit more fun with its 'sexy alien' setup.

Picture: Sourced from a 4K scan, *Species* looks very impressive. Detailing is strong, colours are naturalistic, and well-resolved grain ensures the AVC 2.40:1 Full HD imagery retains a film-like feel.

Species II appears to have been sourced from an older master, but the AVC 1.85:1 Full HD encode still holds up quite well – although CGI and opticals do result in some softer-looking shots.

The AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes of the third and fourth films are technically fine, but the low-budget nature of the productions, and the fact they were shot digitally, leave them looking rather flat.

Audio: All four films are offered with a choice of DTS-HD MA 5.1 and DTS-HD MA 2.0 tracks. The 5.1 mixes



for the first two movies are very enjoyable, with plenty of surround cues and lots of squishy Foley effects. The two DTV entries are more limited in their aspirations, but

still display good atmospheric and reasonable dynamic range.

Extras: 88 Films has loaded this cinematic mixed bag 'Deluxe Collector's Edition' boxset with loads of goodies, including a new interview with Henstridge and a new *Making of...* for *Species*, alongside three commentaries, four vintage featurettes, and an alternate ending.

Species II then sports one commentary, two featurettes, an interview with the writer and unseen footage, *Species III* gets two chat-tracks and five archival featurettes, and *...The Awakening* features a commentary and two interviews. There are also trailers and galleries for each movie, plus a 40-page booklet, poster and art cards. **AvB**



HCC VERDICT

Species Collection: Deluxe Collector's Edition

→ 88 Films → Region B BD → £35

WE SAY: Fans of the franchise will be over the moon with this feature-packed Blu-ray boxset.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

It's the return of the Mc

Ewan McGregor gets a second chance at playing Obi-Wan in Disney's big-budget miniseries

→ OBI-WAN KENOBI

The latest *Star Wars* limited series, in which Ewan McGregor reprises his role as the legendary Jedi Master, has more franchise baggage than any of its predecessors. It says much that the first episode comes with a convoluted recap of Kenobi's role in the first six movies.

Characters from the series form an orderly queue to make their appearance, and there are plenty of familiar beats which will entertain fans.

The show takes place sometime between *Revenge of the Sith* and *A New Hope*, so we find Ben Kenobi holding down a day job in a meat processing plant, while keeping a watchful eye on young Luke Skywalker.

The pacing, at least in the first few episodes, is as slow as the snouty camel-creature Kenobi commutes on, but when the action sequences come they have plenty of swashbuckling kinetic energy.

This version of Obi-Wan is a haggard shadow of his former self, having failed to prevent Anakin Skywalker turning to the Dark Side, and McGregor looks perfect in the role. 'The time of the Jedi is over,' he repeatedly tells anyone he meets. He's long forsaken his lightsaber, thinking his apprentice is dead, but Darth Vader is about to rise once more.

Our hero's downbeat vigil is disturbed when young Princess Leia is carelessly kidnapped on Alderaan, and he's called on to help track her down. Meanwhile a trio of Jedi-hunting Imperial Inquisitors have breezed into town, and one, hot-headed Reva (Moses Ingram), has an obsession with finding the grizzled recluse. The two incidents are not unrelated.



Obi-Wan rocking the Jedi's new autumn/winter collection



Soon Kenobi has a lot more to worry about than carving meat off some big alien bone.

Picture: Shot digitally at 4.5K and presented on Disney+ in 4K Dolby Vision at 2.40:1, *Obi-Wan Kenobi* looks beautiful. Cinematographer Chung-hoon Chung (who recently lensed both *One Night in Soho* and *Uncharted* for cinemas) approaches this TV show with a spectacular bigscreen aesthetic. As with *The Mandalorian* before it, production values are high, set and costume design superb, and visuals sparkle with detail. The HDR grading isn't aggressive, but the series has deep lustre regardless.

Sound: There are top marks also for *Obi-Wan's* multichannel sound design; this Dolby Atmos mix is full of finery and movement, resulting in immersive locations and a feeling of constant energy. Franchise stalwart John Williams isn't on scoring duty, but the work by British composer Natalie Holt effortlessly incorporates elements of the original movies. **SM**

HCC VERDICT

Obi-Wan Kenobi

→ Disney+

WE SAY: Filling in an obvious gap in franchise lore, this glossy series is a must-watch for *Star Wars* lovers.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



J. K. Simmons (right) and Sissy Spacek star as married couple Frank and Irene

→ NIGHT SKY

→ Prime Video

This eight-episode science fiction drama, available to gorge in one sitting via Prime Video, is a curious beast. On the one hand, it blends an intriguing story with first-rate performances from its two principal stars. On the other hand, it ambles along at times with a pedestrian pace, and never quite seems to tie up some of its narrative elements into a satisfying whole.

Night Sky opens in flashback, showing the pool bar meeting of youngsters Irene and Franklin. We skip forward, and they're a late middle-aged married couple played with Tinseltown levels of aplomb by Sissy Spacek and J. K. Simmons. The duo live a quiet, semi-rural life, albeit one overshadowed by the death of their son. They also happen to have a shed on their property hiding a tunnel that leads to a portal to a whole other planet. As you do.

Irene and Franklin often pop down here of an evening to gawp at the otherworldly, without

anything bad happening. Obviously, this situation can't go on for ever...

So, an intriguing premise, and *Night Sky* certainly feels like it wants to say important things about life, the universe and everything in addition to providing eight hours of binge TV. But it falters when the story has to explore other areas. As it begins to lay out its wider connections, involving an Argentinian mother and daughter, and a mysterious cult, it starts to feel a lot less assured. Simmons and Spacek, and their acting chops, are the real stars here, not the *Lost*-style sci-fi convolutions.

That's not to say *Night Sky*, which streams in 4K HDR on Prime Video, isn't worth a watch. Just be warned that this first season doesn't quite hit all the marks, and by the time it wraps you might not feel you've got all the answers, either. Still there's time for that if Season 2 gets greenlit, I suppose. **MC**



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Catalogue classic

Jurassic Park → Ultra HD Blu-ray/3D Blu-ray, Universal

With *Jurassic World: Dominion* playing cinemas, **Anton Van Beek** takes a trip back into cinema's prehistoric past (well, 1993) to revisit a Hollywood blockbuster 65million years in the making...

WHEN STEVEN SPIELBERG'S *Jurassic Park* stomped through cinemas in the summer of 1993, audiences were left staring in wonder at what was unfolding on the screen. Just like Sam Neill and Laura Dern's characters first catching sight of a brachiosaurus, viewers were awestruck as they witnessed a previously extinct prehistoric creature seemingly brought back to life via CGI. And in that moment, cinema was changed forever.

'They show extreme intelligence'

Jurassic Park was far from the first movie to put dinosaurs on the bigscreen, of course. The film history of these so-called 'terrible lizards' stretches back almost as far as the medium itself. As early as 1914 D.W. Griffiths was making *Brute Force* (aka *Primitive Man*), a silent short about a caveman dealing with various problems, including some rather iffy-looking dinosaurs, and Winsor McCay's legendary animated short *Gertie the Dinosaur* appeared in the same year. By 1925, the world was gasping at the stop-motion creatures Willis O'Brien created for the silent adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, a trick he would repeat eight years later, alongside his most famous creation, in 1933's *King Kong*.

Yet as dinosaurs continued to appear on the silver screen, the techniques used to create them stayed more or less the same for the following 60 years. If your production had sufficient time and money then you could follow in the footsteps of O'Brien and use stop-motion animation



The Jurassic Park logo took centre-stage in the film's promotion (left); Sam Neill plays fetch with a T-Rex (above)

(1966's *One Million Years B.C.*), otherwise there was always the option of the man-in-suit approach (1976's *At the Earth's Core*) or puppets (1974's *The Land That Time Forgot*). And if you were really strapped for cash, sticking rubber fins on some real lizards (1960's *The Lost World*) might work.

'Life finds a way'

When Universal Pictures purchased the screen rights to Michael Crichton's bestseller *Jurassic Park* and roped in Steven Spielberg to direct, the filmmaker's first concern was how to bring its prehistoric menagerie to life in a way that modern audiences would believe. 'They were the stars of this picture, the dinosaurs,' he recalled in a 2013 interview. 'And if that didn't work, nothing about *Jurassic Park* could have worked. So that was daunting, because I was using Universal's money to basically make an experimental dinosaur picture.'

Spielberg's solution was to use a combination of approaches. Special make-up effects legend Stan Winston's studio would design and produce full-size puppets and animatronic models of the dinosaurs for close-up work with the film's cast; Phil Tippett's team would handle 'go-motion' animation (a variation of stop-motion incorporating motion blur) for long shots of the beasts; and Dennis Muren of Industrial Light & Magic would look after the digital compositing to blend it all together.

When it came to Winston's animatronics, Spielberg was impressed with what they could do. He was less



Fact file

Year: 1993

Director: Steven Spielberg

Screenwriter: Michael Crichton, David Koepp

Producer: Kathleen Kennedy, Gerald R. Molen

Cast: Sam Neill, Laura Dern, Jeff Goldblum, Richard Attenborough, Joseph Mazzello, Ariana Richards, Bob Peck, Samuel L. Jackson

Running time: 127 minutes

Studio: Universal Pictures



convinced by Tippet's next-gen stop-motion, however. 'Phil Tippet had perfected the motion-blur, which gave go-motion a closer resemblance to real life. But it wasn't 100 per cent,' he says. 'I'd come home and look at the stuff with my kids over and over again. My kids bought it. They said, "Wow, dad. A real dinosaur!" But I still saw the jerks. The movement was very accurate and very rhythmical, but there was still something a bit "go-motion-y" about it.'

'Clever girl'

Enter Dennis Muren and the team at ILM, who had just finished work on the cutting-edge CG effects for *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and now started experimenting with creating digital dinos. Contacting Spielberg with the idea, the filmmaker challenged Muren to prove it. To that end, ILM produced two tech demos, one mapping the movement of the gallimimus herd, the other a photo-real walk-cycle for a T-rex skeleton ambling through a photograph of Hawaii. 'It was so authentic and smooth, I actually said, "Well, that's the future. That's the way it's gonna be from now on," says Spielberg.

But what of those left in the digital revolution's wake? 'It was April 20, 1992. We called it Black Monday, because we got the word that production was going digital,' stated Randall M. Dutra, dinosaur motion supervisor on the film. Or, as Tippet put it: 'We're extinct. We're the dinosaurs. And, of course, that irony wasn't lost on any of us.'

Even though Tippet's go-motion technique wouldn't be the primary source of *Jurassic Park's* dinosaurs once ILM had been brought onboard,



Richard Attenborough (left) as park founder John Hammond; Sam Neill and Laura Dern (above) marvel at the wonders of modern CGI

Spielberg wasn't about to let all that talent and experience go to waste. The stop-motion department produced animatics for two key sequences (the T-rex road attack and the Raptor kitchen chase), and created what became known as 'The Dinosaur Bible', a video showing how various creatures should walk, run, and jump. Working with ILM, they also bridged the gap between the old and new, equipping their stop-motion armatures with motion encoders to create something known as the Dinosaur Input Device. This allowed physical models to be manipulated, and their movements replicated in the digital realm.

'I guess we'll have to evolve too'

Jurassic Park's dinosaurs weren't the only place where the film was breaking new ground – it was also the first to be released in cinemas with a DTS soundtrack, supplied on a CD synchronised by timecode to the film print. 'I pretty much said if any exhibitor wants to run *Jurassic Park*, they're gonna have to put in a DTS sound system so they could really hear the movie the way it was intended to be heard,' said Spielberg. It subsequently became the first film to feature a DTS track on a home entertainment release, on the 1997 LaserDisc.

These digital gambles were a bigger game-changer than anybody could have expected. By the time *Jurassic Park* finished its multiplex rampage, it had earned over \$900m, launched a new audio format, and proved that CG effects were here to stay – superseded in the following decades, but a milestone nevertheless.

None of this would count for much if the film itself was a stinker. *Jurassic Park*, however, had a smart script, thrilling set-pieces and a superb cast – pretty much everything that Spielberg's previous film, *Hook*, had lacked. Its success was assured from the moment Sam Neill stood up in the back of the park jeep, as was its status as a franchise starter, Spielberg himself returning for 1997's *The Lost World*.

And if you want proof of the movie's lasting appeal, remember it was chosen for re-release in 2020 to lure audiences back to US cinemas during the pandemic, even topping the box office for one week. We all love dinosaurs, apparently ■

Jeff Goldblum appeared again as Ian Malcolm in sequel flick *The Lost World*, and had a cameo in *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*

Disc details



Jurassic Park made its Blu-ray debut in the *Jurassic Park Trilogy* boxset in 2011, joined by archival

extras (featurettes, animatics, storyboards, etc) and a new three-part *Return to Jurassic Park* documentary. Two years later a stereoscopic version of the film was released on 3D Blu-ray (with a featurette discussing the 3D conversion). Universal then celebrated the dino-blockbuster's 25th anniversary in 2018 with the release of the *Jurassic Park Trilogy Collection* 4K boxset.

Double-bill it... Westworld



Nearly two decades before he wrote *Jurassic Park*, Michael Crichton cooked up this sci-fi

thriller about another advanced theme park. This time it was an adults-only affair, with visitors living out their wildest historical fantasies in the company of obliging life-like robotic hosts – until the 'bots (including Yul Brynner's black-clad cowboy) malfunction and the slaughter begins.



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TOP 15 Televisions

01



NEW ENTRY

LG OLED65C2

→ £2,700 ★★★★★

Stylish 65in 'Evo' class 4K HDR OLED TV is a true premium performer in every sense, from its class-leading brightness to a processing engine that even makes SD look good. No HDR10+ playback, but do you care? HCC #331

TOP 5 New releases

**Spider-Man: No Way Home [UHD Blu-ray]**

Spidey meets some familiar faces in this enjoyable, affecting celebration of the webslinger's cinematic history. Strong 4K AV credentials and a fun suite of spoiler-ific extras. HCC #330

★★★★★

**Moonfall [UHD Blu-ray, US import]**

Roland Emmerich delivers another hysterically entertaining slice of popcorn cinema with this disaster epic. Give the UK Blu-ray a pass and snaffle this awesome US 4K platter instead. HCC #331

★★★★★

**West Side Story [2021] [UHD Blu-ray]**

With its 'oh so pretty' 4K HDR visuals and lush Dolby Atmos soundtrack, Steven Spielberg's musical remake is definitely worth making a song and dance about on 4K disc. HCC #330

★★★★★

**Dune [UHD Blu-ray]**

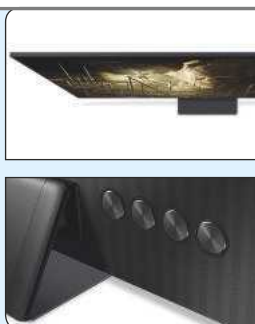
The first part of Denis Villeneuve's new adaptation of the classic sci-fi novel dazzles on 4K BD with demo-worthy visuals and a Dolby Atmos mix as immense as one of the titular planet's sandworms. HCC #329

★★★★★

**The Matrix Resurrections [UHD Blu-ray]**

Ambitious follow-up can't keep pace with the nifty ideas it teases, but this 4K platter's pixel-perfect visuals and over-the-top Atmos sonics are a home cinema treat. HCC #330

★★★★★



02 Samsung QE65QN95B → £3,500 ★★★★★

Second-gen mini LED TV carries a premium price and a flawed smart system overhaul, but counters with a jaw-droppingly good 4K HDR presentation. Improved backlight management yields superb blacks and brightness. Dazzling colours. *HCC #330*



03 Philips 65OLED+936 → £2,500 ★★★★★

65-incher loaded with features, including four-sided Ambilight, Android smarts, HDR10+/Dolby Vision support, 4K/120 playback and a Bowers & Wilkins-designed Dolby Atmos soundbar. A brilliant all-rounder and a fine performer. *HCC #324*



04 Sony KD-65A90J → £3,200 ★★★★★

Far and away Sony's best OLED TV yet, offering a real step forward in terms of brightness and colour vibrancy. Motion handling is also a particular strength, as is the TV's gorgeous styling. *HCC #324*



05 Philips 55OLED806 → £1,200 ★★★★★

New features (including 4K HFR and Film Detection mode) and improved picture and sound make Philips' 55OLED806 not just great value, but one of the best TVs you can buy below £2,000. *HCC #323*



06 Panasonic TX-55JZ2000 → £2,300 ★★★★★

Top-flight Panasonic set featuring an Atmos 5.1.2 integrated sound system, plus upgraded panel and processor. The resulting all-round performance justifies the premium price. *HCC #323*



07 Philips 65OLED+986 → £4,000 ★★★★★

The most ambitious Philips OLED TV yet, this shares the same panel and processing as the cheaper '936 model, but goes large on audio with its custom B&W-designed soundbar. A slice of flatscreen luxury. *HCC #328*



08 Sony XR-65X90J → £1,500 ★★★★★

Upper-tier direct LED TV dazzles with its sharpness, brightness and masterful motion handling, plus Google TV smarts and excellent Acoustic Multi Audio sound system. Very tempting price, too. *HCC #326*



09 Panasonic TX-50JX850 → £630 ★★★★★

No 4K HFR support, but otherwise this LED thinscreen remains a brilliant option at this crowd-pleasing price point. Universal HDR, user-friendly smart system and a dynamic approach to HDR and colour. *HCC #328*



10 Panasonic TX-48JZ980 → £1,400 ★★★★★

The size and spec of Panasonic's entry-level OLED means it has gamers in its sights, but it's also a cracking performer with 4K HDR movies and TV. Sound system is less noteworthy. *HCC #325*



11 Samsung QE50QN90A → £1,200 ★★★★★

The most affordable of Samsung's Neo QLED Mini LED TVs, the QN90A puts the backlighting tech to good use. Contrast and black levels are exemplary by LCD standards, ensuring a cinematic performance. *HCC #326*



12 Philips 65PML9636 → £1,700 ★★★★★

Mini LED lighting and over 1,000 dimming zones make this 65in 4K LCD TV a stellar performer with Dolby Vision content, but inconsistent picture presets hold it back from greatness and can be tricky to 'fix'. *HCC #331*



13 Sky Glass → £Varies ★★★★★

A streaming-only Sky TV platform is integrated into a mid-tier 4K LED set (43in, 50in or 65in, all with Atmos audio) in Sky's innovative new 'Glass'. Not the last word on picture quality, and some usability niggles. *HCC #328*



14 TCL 55RP620K → £400 ★★★★★

Chinese brand's first Roku model in the UK finds the streaming OS brilliantly transplanted into a TV. However, the panel isn't a higher performer, so consider this for a second room rather than your movie den. *HCC #324*



15 Toshiba 50UK3163DB → £350 ★★★★★

Some budget TVs deliver more balanced pictures, but this Toshiba's bright, sharp vibe will deservedly win it plenty of fans. Note the claim of 'HDMI 2.1' connectivity only means support for auto low-latency mode. *HCC #328*

TOP 15 Speaker systems

01

**Paradigm Founder Series LCR/40B 5.0**

→ £7,500 ★★★★★

Relatively compact models in Paradigm's Founder Series make a big impression – the sound here is all about precision, control and superior dynamics. Excellent. *HCC #325*

TOP 5 On-demand

**Marvel's Hawkeye [Disney+]**

This first solo outing for the Avengers' resident archer hits the bullseye, delivering some sensational action scenes amongst the quip-filled dialogue. Fantastic fun. *HCC #327*

★★★★★

**Freaky [Sky Cinema]**

Dumped onto DVD in the UK last year, this slick and inventive body-swap horror-comedy from the brains behind *Happy Death Day* can now be enjoyed in all its gory 4K HDR/Atmos glory on Sky Cinema. *HCC #329*

★★★★★

**The Adam Project**

The *Free Guy* team of director Shawn Levy and leading man Ryan Reynolds hit the sci-fi adventure sweet spot again with this good-hearted, good-looking – and great sounding – time travel flick. *HCC #330*

★★★★★

**Red Notice [Netflix]**

An A-list cast (topped by Gal Gadot, The Rock and Ryan Reynolds) and monster budget can't quite make up for this action-comedy caper's mediocre script. AV credentials are impeccable, however. *HCC #327*

★★★★★

**Peacemaker [Sky Atlantic]**

Enjoyably daft and profane *Suicide Squad* spin-off series follows John Cena's patriotic goofball – and A.R.G.U.S. colleagues – battling parasitic creatures and a hair metal soundtrack. *HCC #331*

★★★★★



02 M&K Sound IW150 5.1 →£8,550 ★★★★★

The in-wall IW150 speakers offer the transparency and detail of a professional studio monitor in an enclosure that can vanish. This array adds driver-matched on-wall tripole surrounds and M&K's fearless X12 sub. The result is outstanding. *HCC #289*



03 Wharfedale DX-2 →£450 ★★★★★

The asking price of this 5.1 system will tell you it doesn't offer the last word in surround sound fidelity, but Wharfedale's package is compact, well made and faultlessly delivers on its home-cinema-on-a-budget promise. *HCC #283*



04 KEF R Series 5.1.2 →£6,250 ★★★★★

Put four floorstanders on front and rear duty for a wonderfully full-bodied surround experience, add Atmos upfiring, and enjoy. *HCC #303*



05 Bowers & Wilkins 600 S2 5.1 →£2,900 ★★★★★

Revised for its 25th anniversary, B&W's entry-level range once again delivers full-range, musical and detailed sonics at a keen price. *HCC #316*



06 Klipsch Reference Premiere 5.1 →£3,000 ★★★★★

Bipole surrounds, a wide, low-slung centre, full-range floorstanders and a well-integrated sub combine in this dynamic, easy-to-drive array. *HCC #300*



07 SVS Prime Tower 5.1.2 →£2,900 ★★★★★

The potent PB-2000 Pro sub provides the bass backbone to this value-for-money, energetic Atmos set. Compact surrounds/heights are easy to install. *HCC #318*



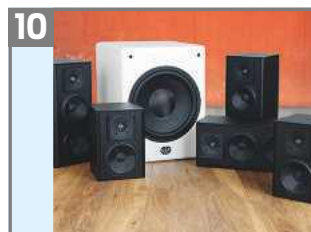
08 Monitor Audio Bronze AV 5.1.2 →£3,250 ★★★★★

The Brit brand's first Atmos speakers top off this very smart-looking and sweet-sounding 5.1.2 system. On-wall surrounds might not suit all setups. *HCC #319*



09 Q Acoustics Concept 50 5.1 →£4,225 ★★★★★

Premium pack with an expansive, rich, moreish soundstage, helped by potent surrounds and centre. Design is as easy on the eye as the sound is on the ears. *HCC #329*



10 M&K Sound LCR750 5.1 →£3,700 ★★★★★

Get M&K's signature sound for less with this (relatively) compact sub/sat system featuring the revamped LCR750 models. Detailed and dynamic. *HCC #310*



11 Sony HT-A9 →£1,799 ★★★★★

Innovative four-speaker-plus-control-box system employs 360 Spatial Sound Mapping to create convincing Dolby Atmos and DTS:X audio. No-clutter immersion. *HCC #331*



12 Polk Reserve 5.0.2 →£2,900 ★★★★★

Atmos upfiring package offers a controlled bass performance and an engaging, non-exhausting sound. Less in-ye-face than previous Polks. *HCC #323*



13 Q Acoustics 3010i 5.1Plus →£1,050 ★★★★★

Q Acoustics pimps its sub/sat system with a new, bigger woofer but doesn't upset the exceptional balance and refinement across the frequency range. *HCC #309*



14 Monitor Audio MASS 5.1 →£600 ★★★★★

Second-gen redesign of MA's sub/sat system refines the styling and colour options, while retaining the compact dimensions and all-round sound quality. *HCC #298*



15 Polk Audio Monitor XT 5.1.2 →£1,175 ★★★★★

Floorstanding Atmos array combines value for money (and basic styling) with an enthusiastic, bass-rich delivery that plays well with popcorn cinema. *HCC #330*

TOP 10 Projectors

01



Sony VPL-VW290ES → £5,500 ★★★★★

Not as bright (1,500 Lumens vs 1,800 Lumens) as Sony's VW590ES, but arguably more appetising considering the lower price tag. Those looking to step up to a native 4K HDR beamer should look here first. *HCC #325*

02



JVC DLA-NZ8 → £15,800 ★★★★★

The price tag might make your wallet quiver, but unparalleled performance, long-life laser lighting, cutting-edge tech and future-proofed features make JVC's HDMI 2.1-equipped 4K HDR projector the best in its class. *HCC #329*

03



Sony VPL-W590ES → £7,000 ★★★★★

A conventional lamp PJ that's less inherently punchy than Sony's 790ES laser flagship (*HCC #316*), but half the price. It also ekes out *better* blacks and still looks lush (and sharp) with 4K HDR. *HCC #318*

04



JVC DLA-N5 → £6,500 ★★★★★

The entry-level native 4K beamer in JVC's range is still a premium option, with motorized zoom/focus/shift controls, extensive setup tools and an excellent performance with 4K HDR and 1080p SDR. *HCC #304*

05



Samsung LSP9T → £7,000 ★★★★★

The top dog in Samsung's new The Premiere range of UST models has a formidable spec, including HDR10+ playback, triple-laser light illumination, 4.2-channel audio and a slick smart hub. Best in class. *HCC #318*

06



BenQ W1800 → £1,099 ★★★★★

Affordable entry-level Ultra HD DLP projector humbles a good number of pricier models with some of the most refined, balanced, sharp and engagingly cinematic 4K HDR images we've seen for under £1,500. *HCC #331*

07



Epson EH-TW9400 → £2,550 ★★★★★

A boosted spec over the TW7400 without a huge price leap. This model ups brightness and contrast, and – with some user care – delivers exceptional 4K HDR images. *HCC #301*

08



Hisense 100L9GTUK → £4,499 ★★★★★

Spectacular colour and brightness coupled with TV-like features (incl. Freeview HD tuner) make this triple-laser UST PJ and 100in light-rejecting screen combo a suitably epic living room solution. *HCC #330*

09



BenQ V7050i → £3,500 ★★★★★

Not the light-cannon you might expect, BenQ's new 4K HDR UST laser beamer does its best work in a darkened room. Images can beguile, and the addition of Android TV is a boon. *HCC #324*

10



Optoma UHD38 → £1,000 ★★★★★

An upgrade on the UHD30 (*HCC #315*), with higher brightness, reduced lag and a second HDMI 2.0 port. These tweaks suit living room setups and bigscreen gaming; dark room viewing is hampered by shallow blacks. *HCC #320*

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TOP 10 Blu-ray players



Panasonic DP-UB9000 → £850 ★★★★★
Supporting both HDR10+ and Dolby Vision, and incorporating useful image adjustments, this premium deck is at the leading edge of UHD BD playback. The build quality and provision of VOD apps heightens its appeal. *HCC #292*



Pioneer UDP-LX800 → £2,200 ★★★★★
A phenomenal universal disc spinner, which adds audiophile-grade music playback to 4K BD talents including Dolby Vision support and metadata information display. Build quality is staggering. *HCC #293*



Panasonic DP-UB450 → £200 ★★★★★
Panasonic lowers the price for Dolby Vision and HDR10+ playback with this feature-lite 4K deck – there's no Wi-Fi or VOD apps, or the brand's HCX processor to fine-tune imagery. *HCC #303*



Pioneer UDP-LX500 → £1,000 ★★★★★
Lacks the audiophile features (including the XLR output) of the UDP-LX800, but this universal deck still sounds sublime with CD and hi-res audio. And like its sibling, you might struggle to find one on sale. *HCC #296*



Reavon UBR-X200 → £1,500 ★★★★★
This universal player from the French startup company fills in a gap left by Oppo. It's a great disc-spinner and well-made to boot, but its network playback side feels unfinished. *HCC #324*



Panasonic DP-UB820 → £330 ★★★★★
Panasonic's mid-ranger delivers on both the HDR10+ and DV fronts, and introduces multichannel analogue outputs. As with the UB450, the VOD portal could do with a style makeover. *HCC #295*



Sony UBP-X800M2 → £350 ★★★★★
DVD-A and SACD playback join Dolby Vision 4K HDR and Sony's typically excellent design and build quality in this mid-range spinner. Yet DV remains awkward to instigate, and HDR10+ is off the menu. *HCC #304*



Sony UBP-X700 → £200 ★★★★★
A compact player updated to Dolby Vision support, the UBP-X700 has a nondescript design, no analogue outs and a stubby remote. But it's well priced, and offers SACD support. *HCC #284*



Cambridge Audio CXUHD → £800 ★★★★★
The lack of analogue outputs is a surprise considering CA's heritage, but this universal (and DV-capable) deck sounds sweet over its digital outs. As with Oppo's UDP-203, a MediaTek SoC is used. *HCC #279*



Sony UBP-X1100ES → £750 ★★★★★
This update on Sony's previous ES-level 4K spinner continues to dazzle with its build quality and audio playback, but the lack of HDR10+ and a clunky Dolby Vision implementation limits its appeal. *HCC #301*

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TOP 10 AV Receivers/AV Processors

01



Denon AVR-X4700H →£1,400 ★★★★★

Denon's first AV amplifier to support 8K and 4K/120fps isn't just playing games. This nine-channel model sounds powerful and entertaining, and drips with feature tricks (including IMAX Enhanced, HEOS and Bluetooth headphone support). *HCC #314*

02



Anthem MRX 740 →£2,800 ★★★★★

Premium price for a seven-channel AVR, but the MRX 740 adds 11-channel processing, ARC Genesis room EQ and HDMI 2.1 upgrade path to a sound performance that mixes power and delicacy. *HCC #321*

03



Denon AVR-X1700H

→£600 ★★★★★

Entry-level X Series AVR goes one up on its costlier stablemates by packing a trio of 8K/4K HFR-capable HDMI inputs. Rated at 7 x 80W, this is well suited to small/mid-size rooms and sub/sat speaker sets. *HCC #328*

04



Emotiva XPA-11

→£2,400 ★★★★★

11-channel amplifier that offers supreme bang-for-buck, delivering 300W to your L/C/R speakers, and 65W for others. Choice of balanced/unbalanced connection. Dynamic sound. *HCC #311*

05



Primare A35.8

→£4,500 ★★★★★

Swedish corp returns to the world of multichannel audio with a cleverly configured (including bridging) eight-channel Class D power amplifier that brings pure, potent, fleet-footed grunt to your movie room. *HCC #331*

06



Arcam AVR11

→£2,800 ★★★★★

Revamped seven-channel HDA-range receiver adds future-proofed HDMI 2.1 connections to Dirac calibration, 7.1.4 expansion potential and wireless streaming skills. *HCC #331*

07



NAD M28

→£4,000 ★★★★★

State-of-the-art Purifi Eigentakt Class D amplification combined with purposeful construction make this flagship 7-channel power amp one to shortlist for a high-spec theatre. *HCC #316*

08



Marantz NR1711

→£650 ★★★★★

The latest half-height model from Marantz adds HDMI 2.1 features to the NR series' typical mix of streaming smarts and rich-sounding multichannel sonics. A tempting price for sub/sat system owners. *HCC #318*

09



XTZ A2-300

→£450 ★★★★★

This Swedish-made Class D amplifier (rated at 2 x 150W into 8ohm) is an affordable and compact way of adding an extra two channels of appreciable power to your AV system. *HCC #326*

10



Yamaha RX-A2A

→£900 ★★★★★

This entry-level seven-channel receiver in Yamaha's Aventure range shows off a glam new look and detailed, balanced sound. Faces stiff competition from rivals, including Yamaha's cheaper RX-V6A. *HCC #324*

TOP 5 Bonus features



West Side Stories

The one real extra accompanying Spielberg's *West Side Story*, but it's a better. This 97-minute documentary explores the making of the movie, particularly its musical set-pieces, in terrific detail. *HCC #330*

★★★★★



Being James Bond

A 45-minute retrospective that focuses on Daniel Craig's 15-year stint as everyone's favourite spy. Craig and producers Michael G. Wilson and Barbara Broccoli chat while the on-set/finished film footage rolls. *HCC #328*

★★★★★



The Making of The Last Duel

There's a long tradition of Ridley Scott movies being joined on BD by must-watch *Making of...* docs. This one's only a half-hour long, but is nevertheless revealing and crammed with detail. *HCC #328*

★★★★★



Aquarius Releasing: An Appreciation

An extra on 88 Films' release of *The Tough Ones*, this is a fascinating look at American distributor Aquarius Releasing and its tactics for remarketing Italian crime flicks. *HCC #324*

★★★★★



Censor commentaries

This stylish British chiller sports not one, not two, but three chat tracks from a variety of participants – each offering different but no less fascinating explorations of the film and the 'video nasty' era. *HCC #329*

★★★★★

TOP 10 Subwoofers

01


SVS SB-1000 Pro → £550 ★★★★★

The budget sub to beat. SVS adds its EQ app to its entry-level range, and squirrels a new 12in driver into a cabinet that's barely any bigger. There's bass extension and power to spare – factor in the price, and the SB-1000 Pro becomes irresistible. *HCC #322*



02


REL S/812 → £2,300 ★★★★★

A fine update of REL's upper-tier Serie S, with a new driver design, punchier amp and revised signal filtering delivering a powerful, poised performance from a glamorous cabinet with stacking potential. *HCC #305*



03


SVS SB16-Ultra
→ £2,500 ★★★★★

A 16in driver and 1,500W amp combine to give SVS's flagship sealed sub real appeal. Goes big and low but remains tight and fast. *HCC #270*

04



NEW ENTRY

M&K Sound X15+
→ £5,995 ★★★★★

THX Dominus-certified sub earns flagship status with push-pull dual 15in driver configuration and a stunning performance. Big and heavy cabinet, so beware! *HCC #331*

05


KEF KC62
→ £1,400 ★★★★★

KEF's dual 6.5in sub delivers controlled, punchy and surprisingly weighty bass from an ultra-compact cabinet that's perfect for a stealth install. *HCC #320*

06


Bowers & Wilkins DB1D
→ £3,750 ★★★★★

This sequel to the DB1 moves EQ to an app and changes driver/amp design. Beautifully controlled performance with depth and detail. Gorgeous bodywork. *HCC #277*

07


SVS 3000 Micro
→ £900 ★★★★★

The US brand's smallest sub yet, employing dual 8in woofers (and 800W Sledge DSP amp) to deliver cinematic LF thrills from an oh-so-discreet enclosure. *HCC #321*

08


Velodyne DB-15
→ £1,495 ★★★★★

The fan-fave bass brand returns with a new range. This 15in, Class AB sub is short of frills (no EQ, remote or wireless hookup) but hits hard and deep. *HCC #325*

09


KEF KF92
→ £2,250 ★★★★★

Smartly styled but powerful dual-driver (9in) mid-range model provides deep bass that's responsive and controlled. Compact and classy. *HCC #330*

10


Klipsch SPL-150
→ £850 ★★★★★

Want a bass bargain? Klipsch's sub goes big with a 15in driver and 400W amp. Impressive LFE depth and energy, in favour of subtlety and speed. *HCC #315*

TOP 5 Console games


Halo Infinite

This new adventure for Master Chief takes the flagship Xbox first-person-shooter series into open-world gameplay territory, but loses none of the *Halo* charm. Play on Series X in both 4K/60fps and 120fps at 1440p. *HCC #327*

★★★★★


LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga

Overhauled graphics and gameplay make this a welcome LEGO revisit to the *Star Wars* universe, as does the chance to play your way through the nine main movies. *HCC #331*

★★★★★


Life is Strange: True Colors

Definitely not one for adrenaline junkies, this narrative-driven, third-person adventure story instead appeals thanks to its beautiful visuals, evocative soundtrack and sweet, measured writing. *HCC #325*

★★★★★


Gran Turismo Sport

The latest incarnation of the 25-year-old PlayStation mainstay drives circles around the competition with its accessible gameplay and slick 4K HDR visuals. Shame about the in-app car purchasing, though. *HCC #330*

★★★★★


Jurassic World Evolution 2

Arriving before *Jurassic World: Dominion* hits cinemas this summer, Frontier's follow up to its 2018 dinosaur park-building sim is bigger and better than before – but still more 'enjoyable' than 'indispensable'. *HCC #328*

★★★★★

TOP 10 Accessories

01



Amazon Fire TV Stick 4K → £50 ★★★★★

This streaming dongle brings 4K HDR (HDR10+; Dolby Vision) and Dolby Atmos to your movie den. Voice control aids search, while a quad-core processor yields quick load times and stream optimisation. A little stunner. *HCC #295/#326*



02



Bluesound Node → £550 ★★★★★

Preamp/DAC now includes HDMI eARC, a smarter control system and upgraded processing. As with earlier generations, it's a winning mix of comprehensive features and beguiling sonics. Perfect for adding music to your system. *HCC #324*



03



Audio Technica AT-LP5x → £350 ★★★★★

Our favourite affordable turntable. Easy to set up with in-built phono stage and USB for PC hookup, plus 33/45/78rpm speed control, the LP5x has good pitch stability and a rhythmic, energetic sound. *HCC #318*

04



Lumagen Radiance Pro 5348 → £8,700 ★★★★★

Premium, do-it-all video processor with HDR tone mapping, colour calibration, HDMI switching and scaling talents. Chiefly aimed at those with projector systems seeking best-in-class performance. *HCC #320*

05



iFi Audio Zen DAC → £130 ★★★★★

USB DAC that outperforms its budget price and packs features including digital filter selection and balanced/unbalanced headphone output. This will bring a little stereo joy to your cinema system. *HCC #313*

06



NAD C 700 → £1,300 ★★★★★

NAD's compact, stereo BluOS streaming amplifier drags your music collection into the 21st century with a fair amount of Class D welly. Includes HDMI ARC for use in a TV-based setup. *HCC #329*

07



XTZ A2-400 → £740 (excl. tax) ★★★★★

Delivering a huge amount of power from a small, no-nonsense chassis, XTZ's 2 x 220W power amp is a simple, cost-effective method of adding more channel grunt to your AV receiver. *HCC #329*

08



Nanoleaf Lines → £180 (kit) ★★★★★

Illumination brand's app-controlled modular LED wands are easy to fit and offer plenty of setup scope and flexibility. A smart, if not exactly cheap, way to pimp your movie den. *HCC #329*

09



Zidoo Neo S → £1,099 ★★★★★

Hi-res audio network player/DAC with 4K HDR video playback over HDMI has system hub potential. Android OS doesn't incl. Google Play, however, so adding apps is awkward. *HCC #330*

10



Roku Streaming Stick 4K → £50 ★★★★★

Easy-to-use 4K HDMI streamer is a brilliant add-on for boxset bingers thanks to multi-HDR (inc. Dolby Vision and HDR10+) provision and Dolby Atmos support – but the latter doesn't extend to music apps. *HCC #330*

TOP 5 Blu-ray boxsets



Mae West in Hollywood, 1932-1943

Deluxe packaging, a cornucopia of bonuses and excellent transfers for ten of the 12 movies that 'blonde bombshell' Mae West made during her censor-baiting Hollywood career. *HCC #327*

★★★★★



Shawscope: Volume One

A kick-ass Blu-ray boxset featuring some of the finest examples of 1970s Hong Kong action cinema. Eleven movies in total, all accompanied by various goodies, plus two soundtrack CDs and a 60-page book. *HCC #327*

★★★★★



Mad Max Anthology [UHD Blu-ray]

With impressive 4K remasters of the three classic *Mad Max* titles alongside the barnstorming 2015 follow-up, this UHD boxset is a must-own for fans of George Miller's franchise. *HCC #330*

★★★★★



Cartoon Saloon's Irish Folklore Trilogy

Three excellent feature films from the Irish animation studio (including *Wolfwalkers*, making its disc debut) housed in a gorgeous, feature-packed four-disc BD package. *HCC #328*

★★★★★



The Godfather Trilogy [UHD Blu-ray]

These new 4K restorations ensure that Francis Ford Coppola's mafia saga has never looked so good, and are joined by a terrific collection of new and archival extras. *HCC #330*

★★★★★

TOP 10 Soundbars



Sennheiser Ambeo Soundbar → £2,200 ★★★★★
The audio specialist's debut soundbar makes a dramatic entrance. 13 drivers, including 4in woofers, create a cinematic soundstage, with impressive immersion via Atmos, DTS:X and Sennheiser's Ambeo processing. Big and bold. *HCC #302*



Samsung HW-Q950A → £1,250 ★★★★★
A premium sound system that loves a Hollywood blockbuster, Samsung's 11.1.4-channel flagship marries convenience with superb power, detail and immersion. A pity that auto calibration is only an option for Samsung TV owners, though. *HCC #324*



JBL Bar 2.0 All-In-One
→ £150 ★★★★★
Affordable and stereo-only, this compact HDMI ARC-equipped 'bar earns its keep by sounding powerful and purposeful, and being blissfully simple to set up and use. *HCC #306*



Sony HT-A7000
→ £1,200 ★★★★★
This soundbar's 7.1.2 speaker array sounds sublime with movies and music thanks to its sense of scale, detail and tonality. Compatible with optional wireless rears and sub, but such a system becomes pricey. *HCC #326*



JBL Bar 5.0
→ £350 ★★★★★
One-box system that deploys slick DSP to engineer impressive virtual height/width immersion from Atmos soundmixes despite a forward-firing driver array. Compact design, enticing price. *HCC #320*



Denon Home Sound Bar 550
→ £550 ★★★★★
Relatively pricey for a stereo 'bar, but the performance of this Denon is a cut above the norm thanks to excellent bass integration and crisp highs. HEOS streaming brings extra treats, too. *HCC #323*



Klipsch Cinema 600
→ £600 ★★★★★
Given the lack of Dolby Atmos (native or virtual), this soundbar/subwoofer system feels expensive, but it proves an exhilarating listen; dynamic and clean with seamless bass integration. *HCC #328*



Philips Fidelio B97
→ £1,000 ★★★★★
Atmos system with excellent connectivity and detachable surrounds for when you want the full experience. A furious bass response helps it sound full-range and cinematic, but height effects are a tad shy. *HCC #322*



Yamaha MusicCast Bar 40 SW
→ £550 ★★★★★
Soundbar/sub combi snubs its nose at Atmos in favour of DTS Virtual:X processing, but comes recommended for its rich and weighty sound signature and MusicCast multiroom skills. *HCC #331*



JBL L75ms
→ £1,500 ★★★★★
Designed to be just as happy competing with entry-level separates as it is augmenting your TV sonics, this distinctive stereo wireless speaker/soundbar is an appealing alternative to a me-too 'bar. *HCC #331*

TOP 5 Back-catalogue Blu-rays



RoboCop: Limited Edition [UHD Blu-ray]
This fantastic upgrade of Arrow's 2019 Blu-ray ports across extensive extras, while adding 4K HDR10/DV presentations of both cuts accompanied by new Dolby Atmos remixes. *HCC #330*
★★★★★



The Proposition [UHD Blu-ray]
From a new 4K scan with director-approved HDR grade to a vast array of extras, the BFI has put together the ultimate edition of John Hillcoat's 2005 Aussie Western. *HCC #331*
★★★★★



Alligator: Collector's Edition [UHD Blu-ray, US import]
Shout! Factory's release of the 1980s creature-feature has plenty of bite thanks to a gorgeous restoration and generous set of bonus goodies. Fans will definitely want to snap it up... *HCC #331*
★★★★★



Vampyr: Limited Edition
This Blu-ray restoration deftly negotiates potential source-related pitfalls and captures the surreal, dreamlike beauty of Carl Theodore Dreyer's 1932 horror classic. Extensive analytical extras complete a top package. *HCC #331*
★★★★★



An American Werewolf in London [UHD Blu-ray]
Another 4K upgrade from Arrow. The classic horror-comedy looks gorgeous in its Dolby Vision HDR clothes, and the disc also carries the full complement of extras from the 2019 BD. *HCC #329*
★★★★★

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TOP 5 PVRs



Manhattan T3 Freeview Play 4K, £80

Do you need an HDD PVR in the streaming era? This Freeview Play box loads up catchup via a responsive UI, offers welcome Watchlist functionality, and is ready for 4K HLG HDR

★★★★★



Sky Q, £subscription

Sky's new top-tier product offering dazzles with its image-rich user interface, wireless multiroom skills and recording flexibility delivered by the PVR's 12 tuners. Now supports 4K content

★★★★★



Humax Aura, £varies

The PVR honcho teams up with Google for this Android-powered triple-tuner Freeview Play machine in 1TB (£250) and 2TB (£280) flavours. 4K HDR capable, it uses voice search and slick UI to make operation a joy.

★★★★★



Humax DTR-T4000, £subscription

This YouView-based PVR is required to get BT Sport's new Ultra HD channel – available to those with BT fast fibre and a BT TV sub. Easy to use and with 1TB of storage

★★★★★



Manhattan T3-R, £varies

Available in 500GB (£170) or 1TB (£200) models, this twin-tuner Freeview Play PVR provides – like its non-HDD T3 stablemate – a slick user experience, with classy menus, a compact design and 4K HDR playback

★★★★★

TOP 5 Headphones

NEW ENTRY



Mark Levinson No. 5909, £999

An astonishing demonstration of just how good active noise cancelling wireless Bluetooth headphones can sound. Performance is flawless, so it's really only the price that niggles

★★★★★



Meze Audio 99 Classics, £270

These wired cans look lovely and offer a level of audiophile fidelity you might reasonably expect from models costing twice as much. Not a bass beast, but that's kinda the point

★★★★★



Audio Technica ATH-Mx50BT, £180

Cable-free Bluetooth update of a wired design, with 45mm drivers and lengthy battery life (claimed to hit 40 hours). Sturdy and comfortable, and a great sound for the money

★★★★★



Sennheiser HD 450SE, £170

This canny Special Edition update to Sennheiser's mid-range noise-cancelling '450BT Bluetooth headphones delivers well-balanced sound and improved voice assistant support.

★★★★★



Sony WH-1000XM4, £330

The latest generation of Sony's noise-cancelling wired/wireless 'phones retain the driver array and styling of their predecessor but upgrade signal processing via Edge AI and load on some new smart listening features

★★★★★

TOP 5 Wireless speakers



KEF LS50 Wireless II, £2,250

At the top of KEF's LS50 collection, you'll find this revamped active stereo system that blends lush looks and great connectivity (including HDMI eARC) with sparkling sonics

★★★★★



JBL Charge 5, £160

JBL's battery-powered, portable Bluetooth speaker stalwart continues to impress in its fifth-gen iteration. IP67 waterproof rated and built to last, it packs a surprisingly potent performance from a small chassis

★★★★★



DALI Katch G2, £330

Second-generation Katch wireless speaker looks every bit as slick as its predecessor, but now boasts aptX HD and AAC Bluetooth functionality and a bolstered 30-hour battery life. A superb performer

★★★★★



Klipsch The Fives, £830

Active stereo pair with horn-loaded tweeters, 4.5in midbass drivers and a claimed 160W power plant. Dynamic performance is backed up by extensive connectivity including HDMI ARC and USB

★★★★★



Q Acoustics M20, £400

Active two-way bookshelf speakers combining a comprehensive spec (including hi-res USB playback) with a performance that outstrips the price point, plus elegant styling. A real bargain

★★★★★

HOME CINEMA

Choice

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CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER



AV Avenger

Watchers are waking up to the idea of quality when it comes to streaming services, says **Steve May**, but churn is getting fierce. And have you tried Apple TV+ yet?

GOOD NEWS, EVERYONE! According to the latest TV trends survey from the boffins in the DTG (Digital TV Group), quality increasingly matters to the average telly watcher when it comes to resolution, audio and content. It seems once you've tried 4K, you can't go back – about time too.

Apparently, we now also expect all subscription VOD and digital outlets to be available across all devices, and such provision is increasingly becoming a criterion when it comes to buying a new TV.

In case you hadn't guessed, 'tis the season for stats and facts, and there's plenty pouring out about streaming services. According to market watchers Omdia Research, the average UK household uses 2.6 pay subscription services, which breaks down into two SVOD services and (not sure how this works) 0.6 Pay TV. If that's too confusing, consider this:

80 per cent of all UK homes subscribe to at least one streaming platform.

Netting the most

YouTube and BBC iPlayer are our fave online video services, but are closely followed by Netflix. This remains the king of SVOD, with 15.5million UK subscribers. The second most popular paid-for service in the UK is Prime Video, with 10m subscribers, while Disney+ is closing in with 7.5m.

But with great choice comes great churn. Omdia reveals that the number of services that have been cancelled and then resubscribed to over the past year has jumped 84 per cent, which can only mean buyers are getting a lot more savvy. We're jumping on a service to watch a premium show or three, and then bailing when we've cleared out our Watch List.

But we're still paying, one way or the other. The cost of living crisis might have us turning off heating, but the number of people paying for video services

in the UK has actually risen by over 11 per cent, over the past year.

The biggest mover in the right direction is Disney+, which is up 21 per cent, courtesy of the likes of *Encanto* and *Moon Knight*. Sky's streaming operation Now is nipping at its heels, up 18 per cent, no doubt powered by its massive billboard marketing campaign. Netflix and Prime Video have languished, with only 8 and 5 per cent growth respectively.

These figures don't take into account the renewed push Amazon is giving to its ad-supported offering, the freshly rechristened Freevee, with its mix of some relatively hot new shows, like *Bosch: Legacy*, and copious catalogue titles last seen on Prime Video. There's also the *Star Trek*-powered SVOD platform Paramount+, plus Peacock and Discovery+ predicted to experience strong growth by 2026. You're going to need a spreadsheet to manage your churn-table.

Interestingly, Apple TV+ doesn't appear in Omdia's market breakdown, presumably because it's not core (see what I did there?) to the OTT scene.

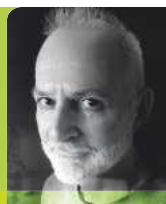
On one level, I don't get Apple TV+ at all, because it doesn't really bring anything to the Apple table. It certainly doesn't help sell smartphones or Macbooks, and has little chance of catching rivals. But I sure am glad it's there, vanity project or not. In terms of quality, it's fighting at the front. Shows like *Severance*, *Shining Girls* and *Invasion* (pictured) are wonderful, and its technical attributes are immense.

Not only is everything 4K Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos, Apple TV+ shows just tend to sound sensational. It's almost as if the commission sheet says 'make your audio design as immersive as heck, and don't mix for a soundbar!'

So if you've not taken a bite, tuck in ■

*What are your streaming TV series recommendations?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Steve May's ticklist for a new TV includes image quality (obviously), sound quality, and a stand that doesn't take three hours to assemble





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